THE AWAKENING OF ASIAN WOMANHOOD

MARGARET E. COUSINS

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BY

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

THE makers of history have no time to be writers of it—till afterwards. The author of this book is so busily engaged in one department of history-making in India that it has taken the publishers two years to get the materials for it from her. Her duties as Joint Secretary of the Women's Indian Association call her to places as far apart as Karachi and Mandalay in the disinterested and loving service of her sisters to which she has devoted her life. At the same time she has had to fulfil over extended periods the duties of Editor *pro tem* of "Stri Dharma," the monthly organ of The Women's Indian Association and the non-sectarian feminist movement in India.

The contents of this book have, therefore, come into existence, not as cold reminiscent history, but as living and immediate despatches in the form of newspaper and magazine articles written during the campaign in India for the

bringing of the direct power of women into all departments of public life. This campaign began with the demand for the legislative franchise by the All-India Women's Deputation to the Viceroy and the Secretary of State in 1917, and has been amazingly, though not yet completely, successful. Behind this demand for the vote as a symbol of free citizenship lay the principle of freedom for women to vote or not to vote, to co-operate or to non-co-operate, as they chose. This is the centre-point of all Mrs. Cousins' self-renouncing work. It applies to all purely national movements, and yet, as work for woman as woman, knows no frontiers. For this reason, Mrs. Cousins has laboured for the sacred cause of purifying the world through the free power of womanhood with equal zeal in Ireland and England (in both of which places she suffered imprisonment for the cause), in India and in Burma.

It is plain, however, from this book, that Indian womanhood has won a special place in the author's heart; and those who have observed Mrs. Cousins moving among her Indian sisters have expressed their admiration for her power of identifying herself with

their lives even despite linguistic difficulties, and of unobtrusively inspiring them to unwonted activities. Her reward is the warm affection of Indian women of all ranks all over the country, who have responded to her lofty sincerity and to her enthusiastic practical idealism which steps without incongruity from argument, criticism or persuasion on the public platform to the floor on which she teaches arts and crafts (which she learned for the purpose) to Indian girls and women as a means of creative expression and social amenity.

This book, the publishers believe, will be treasured by many the world over not only for its record of one phase of the complex struggle for India's freedom, but for its declaration of universal and everlasting principles concerning womanhood, for its illuminating character-analysis of Asian women in general and its intimate appreciation in particular of three of India's most notable women of today.

The chapters of this book have appeared as articles in "The Times of India," "New India," "Stri Dharma," "Tomorrow," and

"Britain and India". Where necessary, permission has been obtained for their inclusion, for which the publishers express their thanks.

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CHAPTER I

THE AWAKENING OF ASIAN WOMANHOOD

NOTWITHSTANDING the immense extent of the continent of Asia, and the great number and variety of the races inhabiting it, it is very remarkable how, from time to time, it responds as one entity to a single well-defined current of thought. History shows us how a wave of religious revival has swept over it from end to end at one time, a wave of artistic expression at another time, of political weakness at still another; and at the present time there is rising in the hearts of Asian womanhood a mighty wave of desire for freedom.

From Palestine to Japan it displays itself. It whispers its presence amongst the Moslem women; it shouts of itself along the streets of Canton; and it wins its victory in South India. Everywhere there is a shaking

off of shackles—and everywhere it is from within that the effort comes to get rid of them. It is not Westerners who are coming along and, from outside, striking off fetters. No! the women of Asia are, of their own initiative, and through their own growing surge of desire for self-expression, pressing against their barriers and breaking them down. People hardly realise how much activity is going on in these directions. The feeling shows itself in different ways in different countries. In one place women rebel against veils; in another country, or part of a country, they begin to make use of umbrellas and sandals; in another they rebel against the binding of the feet; in others they ask for educational facilities or for political recognition.

Intercommunication between the various countries of Asia is comparatively small. The Indian woman, as a rule, knows much more about the women of Britain or America, thousands of miles away from her, than of the Chinese women who are her next-door neighbours. Yet a fair amount of information has been gleaned from various sources by the Women's Indian Association about the details

of the growing feminist movement in Asia, and progressive men and women everywhere will no doubt be glad to have it brought to their notice in a collected form.

Reviewing broadly the peoples which comprise Asian womanhood, the chief are—the Muhammadan, the Jewish, the Indian, the Burmese, the Chinese, and the Japanese. Amongst the Muhammadan women, whether of Asia Minor, Arabia, Persia, Turkistan, or India, the stirrings of a new life are discernible, the movement for removing veils being so strong in Teheran among the Persian women that a deputation of well-known women waited some time ago on their Prime Minister to request him to help them in their attempts at emancipation. The Armenian women have volunteered to fill administrative posts in order to release their men for active military service in an army which the Armenians have mobilised to oppose the Turks. The Republic of Armenia has been the first to appoint a woman as a Consul, having constituted an Armenian widow its Consul to the Empire of Japan. So advanced is education for women and girls in Afghanistan

that a Women's University for the study of medicine has been built in Kabul, and has five hundred women students in attendance. The Turkish women have been forced out of their very strict *purdah* by the rigours and hardships of war, and the poor things are now in a very deplorable state, preliminary doubtless to a freer life in the future.

Twentyfive women representatives of different countries in the Near and Middle East attended a World Conference of Communist Women at Moscow in 1921. The presence of these Asian women, who had surmounted almost incredible difficulties in journeying thither, created a very profound impression. One of them, Tursum Baya, a member of the Executive Committee of the Soviet Republic of Turkistan, replied to greetings on their behalf as follows: "I greet the International Women's Conference from the women of Turkistan. The struggle of the Russian proletariat has opened the doors to the women of the East. We who have been slaves of slaves are now entering a life of freedom. We join hands with you in a common cause." The Conference made a great impression in Europe.

The women in Palestine have started a Jewish Women's Equal Rights Association to combat the possibility of women being subjected to the authority of the Rabbinical Courts—courts which apparently scarcely recognise that a woman has a separate existence at all. According to the orthodox Jewish teaching, a woman cannot be a witness, or the guardian of her children, nor can she inherit, or own her own earnings. She remains all her life under the tutelage of her father, husband or brother. The Jewish women have sent forward a memorandum to the Government praying that they may not have to come under the jurisdiction of these courts as they cannot submit to such a degradation.

Turning then to India, one finds that, though the percentage of education is appallingly low, the tradition of Indian law leaves women very free to take any position for which they show themselves capable. No Indian political organisations were at any time closed to women. Women have at every stage of Indian history taken high positions in their country's public service. Springing from their religious philosophy

there is fundamentally a belief in sex equality, and this shows itself when critical periods demand it. This has been clearly shown during the movement of the past ten years for self-government. Women have had their share in all the local Conferences and in the National Congress. No one who was present can easily forget the sight of the platform at the Calcutta Congress of 1917 when three women leaders, Mrs. Annie Besant, President of the Congress, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, representative of the Hindu women, and Bibi Amman, mother of the Ali brothers and representative of the Muslim women, sat side by side, peeresses of such men-leaders (also present) as Tilak, Gandhi and Tagore, and receiving equal honour with them.

During all this time, the men of the Indian nation demanded that whatever rights of self-government were granted to them should be applicable to women also, and this big human principle has been turned into effect by them in the local Councils over which they have gained control. In the Bombay and Madras Presidencies women have the Municipal and Local Boards vote, and they exercise

it with interest and intelligence. In the Indian State of Indore a woman has been nominated a Municipal Commissioner by the Government. It has therefore been only the climax of an already existent public opinion, and not a bolt from the blue, that the Madras Legislative Council, at the first opportunity, passed a Resolution enfranchising the women of its Presidency, and that Bombay Presidency soon followed suit, and that these equal suffrage rights have been accorded to women also by the Indian States of Travancore, Cochin, Mysore and Jhalawar. Indeed, the progressive little State of Cochin leads the way, for it allows its women the right to become Legislative Councillors as well as to vote for them, and it has totally removed all forms of sex-disqualification from the Rules connected with its newly established Legislative Council, thus bringing a part of India right abreast of America in sex equality in political rights!

The grant of the suffrage to Indian women will undoubtedly be a driving force in enabling them to secure greater educational facilities for themselves, and when education becomes

compulsory and has extended its period of years, the future of India will be rosy indeed. An incident will illustrate the spirit of the new life in women. When a group of Muhammadan women went recently to vote at a South Indian Municipal election, though a special polling booth had been arranged for women with a woman registrar of votes, these women would not be content until the male superintendent of the polling station came and personally guaranteed that their votes were legitimate and would be effective for their candidate!

The Non-co-operation movement is playing a large part in the awakening of Indian women. The wives of imprisoned leaders become themselves leaders and public speakers, Presidents of Conferences, organisers of meetings, etc. Large numbers of women are collectors for the funds of the movement, and everywhere women encourage in all ways its policy of *swadeshi* (home manufacture). (?)

It is quite probable that one day the women of India will lead the women of the East in all public movements, as they are the first to get their hands on the helm of government.

The Burmese women are possibly the freest women in the East, taken all round. They have the business of the country almost entirely in their own hands, and the standard of female education is also very high amongst them. They are fettered by neither caste system, *purdah* nor early marriage. The Burmese Legislative Council unanimously requested the British Parliament to include woman franchise in its Bill for Reformed Burmese Government.

In China women are decidedly awake. The Far Eastern press reported that on March 30, 1921, over a thousand militant suffragettes held a meeting in Canton to discuss plans for securing equality of the sexes. The meeting was of the most enthusiastic character. The hall was decorated with scrolls inscribed "Equality of the sexes! Give us the vote! Woman Suffrage for China"! From this meeting a parade of over 700 women marched through the streets to the accompaniment of songs, and, invading the Canton Provincial Assembly, which was discussing a bill for the election of district magistrates, demanded the addition of a clause granting women the right

to vote. The Assembly was at once thrown into disorder, and the women underwent some rough treatment. After the uproar had subsided, the women had an audience with the Prime Minister, and later with the chief of the Military Government, both of whom promised to help them to attain their object. Later news informs us that the motion failed to gain a majority when it was subsequently introduced into the Assembly. We may therefore expect to hear more of the agitation of these eager, hard-working and practical women. Another notable feature of Chinese progress is the fact that there are hundreds of Chinese women doctors, Christian converts who have taken out their diplomas in America, a country to which a large proportion of the intelligent girls of China go for their education.

Here are the words of a Korean woman who is believed to be the first ever to have entered public affairs: " For the past four thousand years," she said, " the women of Korea have been forced to stay at home and look after the children. Now the broad current of progressive ideas sweeping the world has

reached into the most secluded corner of our land, and the time has come for the women of Korea to awaken and to play their part in the general social welfare."

Events have marched so quickly in the Land of the Rising Sun that one is not surprised to read of the large number of Japanese women who are tram conductors, typists, detectives, clerks, teachers, and public entertainers there. But while ninety per cent of the girls got a good education, women had no political rights. They were only allowed to listen to the proceedings in the Diet, and quite a large number did so. They were not allowed to form any kind of political association or to become members of any men's political society. A strong agitation arose recently, led by the University women, against these unjust and arbitrary limitations. A largely signed petition was presented to the Diet in 1921 and with much lobbying of the Members resulted in the introduction of a Bill into the lower House of Representatives for the removal of these prohibitions. To the delight of all, this passed with a large majority. Hopes ran high, only, alas ! to be dashed to the ground when the

Bill went for ratification to the House of Peers. An influential member, Baron Fujimaru, took a reactionary view of the matter and carried the Peers with him in his contention that such a Bill would jeopardise the possibility of the Japanese women being "good wives and mothers". The Bill failed to get a majority, and the women suffered a great disappointment. But the reverse made them more determined than ever to win their freedom, and they organised such a vigorous campaign of protest and of education of the Peers that a year later (1922) they won the right to form political societies and to attend political meetings.

Japan is the only Asian country where the women are showing a strong international spirit. They have started a branch of the International Women's League for Freedom and Peace. They are also showing special interest in all efforts towards disarmament. Another important side of their emancipation is the organising of the million-odd women factory workers into Women's Trades Unions. In this they are far ahead of any Eastern country. Finally, the chief Buddhist sect has agreed to remove all sex disabilities from women

Buddhist priests, and to allow them the right to participate in all details of temple administration.

In order to measure adequately the significance of the various attempts at revolt that are taking place throughout the womanhood of Asia, one must remember how different has been and still is the point of view in the East regarding womanhood from that in the West. Throughout hundreds of centuries the Eastern woman has fitted into the Eastern scheme of things, not as the companion, chum, partner, co-equal of man; not as the self-chosen, to be wooed and won by the lover; not as the independent soul working out her own salvation, but as the passive, secondary, remote, dependent, usually ignorant but necessary female, whose purpose in life was fulfilled only through her ability to produce sons—and daughters as a concession. The Eastern view gives little or no value to a woman as an individual soul: therefore it is that the young widow is considered such a waste product and is so despised. But to the woman *as mother*, unlimited honour is accorded in theory, and often, though not always, in

practice. As marriage is the gateway to freedom for French women, and economic independence for American, so is motherhood for all Eastern women. The roots of this honour of the mother-woman are deeply imbedded in the religions of Asia, all of which preach a doctrine of spiritual entail (through a son) more stringent and binding than any merely material entail of land or title.

It is along the line of retention of honour for the woman as mother or prospective mother, then, that all the gropings after greater freedom are expressing themselves in Asia. If the manhood of the race is being educated, while the womanhood is left in ignorance, then, for the sake of the future respect of the sons for their mothers, the girls who will be these mothers must get education. For the sake of her honour as mother, a legal right to a proportion of her husband's property must be granted to the widow-wife. For the protection of her sons, the mothers of another Asian nation, the Japanese, are agitating that they may be given the right of forming associations, one to be for the promotion of international peace.

All over Asia there is a natural shrinking in women from publicity; there is intense shyness; there is a great deal of self-consciousness and sex-consciousness, out of which education alone will lift the women. Although the *purdah* has been drawn in many cases, or but a thin one still exists, its memory and its shadow hang over the actions of all Eastern women. For instance, the courage needed by an Indian woman to walk through a street, carrying her baby and her book, to an afternoon class for continuing the lessons which were cut off from her at twelve years old, is as great as that needed by Englishwomen to go and serve on the battlefield. The Eastern woman is, moreover, unaccustomed to any form of individual initiative. All her life she is accustomed to having a number of women around her. No action is private. The joint family system sees to that. It takes a remarkably strong-willed individual to hew out her own way when every detail of it has to pass in review before a score of interested relatives, all having little to talk about except family gossip.

These factors, and many others of a similar nature, have to be borne in mind as the

background to every effort for progress that is being made by women right across Asia. That the same movement for emancipation is displaying itself from end to end of the continent without much impact from the West, is a proof that Asia is one by links of religion, fundamental custom, temperament, attitude to life, and, above all, by its ideal of women.

CHAPTER II

INDIAN WOMANHOOD: A NATIONAL ASSET

No movement for national, moral, or social progress can attain its true and maximum success if it studies the well-being and works through the agency of one sex only or primarily. Usually however the welfare of women is considered of such secondary importance that it is either overlooked, or left to the future for enquiry, or taken for granted as being so satisfactory as to need no improvement. Yet a little thought enables one to trace many of the problems needing solution back to the failure to recognise the vital importance to India of the service which can be rendered to her only by her women—problems that have arisen because of conditions in women's life which urgently need remedying in order that the gifts brought by them,

in common with the women of all nations, to their motherland may be as valuable as nature has intended them to be.

The Creator of the universe has entrusted to women the supreme honour of creating in detail and bringing into being every human unit in the nation. Women are the supreme nation-builders in the physical sense. Their function of motherhood, with its pains, responsibilities, recompenses, sorrows and joys, is an international bond of union among women all the world over. The service given by women to the nation in the bearing of children is invaluable, a service paid for by their very lives in only too many cases, alas! since in India 232 more women than men die out of every 1,000 between the ages of 15 and 30. Women constantly face their own battlefield without any pomp, glory, proper equipment or due appreciation; and in their person is the struggle often fought to a finish between the forces of Life and Death. They are as much national heroes as any khaki-clad soldier in the European War. Part of this great service of building bodies consists in the immense work of feeding, clothing, and cleaning

the community. The work of the world would go on badly, and the temper of the men suffer seriously, but for the amount of cooking alone done by women! Men rarely realise that women's work is a great deal more than sitting at home. Women themselves rarely appreciate their own work at its proper and proportionate value. In reality Indian women are doing as great a part of the work of the country in building up the human bodies as men are doing in building up the National Constitution or in doing any other work that belongs to them.

Marriage and motherhood are especially important in India because there are in India only 954 women to every 1,000 men, unlike Great Britain and Ireland where there are two and a half millions more women than men in the total population. In these circumstances it is most necessary that the conditions of marriage should be the best possible in order that there may be a continuation of healthy children, of strong men and women.

Physiology, western experience, race statistics, all prove that motherhood imposed on mere children of from 13 years to 17 years

of age is the source of weak progeny, and debilitated, prematurely aged and diseased women. The Indian custom of child-marriage is an anachronism; an insult to the moral self-control of Indian young men and young women; the evil legacy of an ancient fear, unbased at the present time; a menace to the physique of the Indian Nation; and a continuous depreciation of the service which her women are willing to give in its best degree to their country.

Not only does this stupid custom of child-motherhood strike at the physical well-being of the Nation but it also affects its mental progress. One of the conditions of good motherhood is that the mothers, who so largely mould the minds of their children, should not be ignorant and reactionary. In olden times girls got education with the boys. Then came the time when this form of education ceased, but the other systems brought forward did not include equal opportunities for girls. Indeed, for a time these systems were blind to the existence of one great half of the Nation. Then arose that ignorance in Indian womanhood which is the

root of so much deplorable conservatism at the present day. Very often men want to move forward, but their womenfolk hold them back through their lack of the opportunities which men have for mental growth got in schooling. Even the present disgracefully small facilities of education for girls are minimised still further by the early-marriage custom which cuts off schooling from girls just when they are most interested in it and deriving its greatest benefits. Over ten million girls are married between the ages of ten and fifteen each year. Every father and mother, every boy and girl, who agitates and works for the extension of the age of consummation of marriage, is ministering to one of the most fundamental needs of present-day India. Girls must be given the chance of a longer period of education and a longer period for maturing the strength of their bodies in order that their children and they themselves may live longer than they do and be able to bring up a stronger race of people, under more enlightened motherly guidance.

Turning to another side of women's influence on the national life, it is not

sufficiently realised that women naturally demand and appreciate beauty in their surroundings. Their desire for lovely colours and fine textures in their clothes, for pretty ornaments and jewelry, for flower-decked hair and perfumes, have a much deeper root than vanity. It is an evidence of their inherent love of beauty, and it is an invaluable asset to the Nation since it draws forth the arts and crafts that are the pride of India. It is no harm for girls to have a love of really beautiful things. Far from being a weakness, it is a strength, so long as it is not used only for selfish enjoyment, but cultivated with a view also to adding to the beauty of their country. Let them be encouraged to bring all the loveliness they desire into their homes, their gardens, and their country. Thus will they enrich sordid human conditions. This same inherent love of beauty shows itself in the talent girls have for learning poetry, for acting (when they get the chance), for music. They have natural gifts of imagination and sensitive emotion which at present are largely wasted for want of the education which alone can make permanent the fleeting inspirations

of the artistic soul. Who does not remember with pride such poetesses as Mira Bai, Mukta Bai, Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu? There is a wealth of art-life hidden and dormant in Indian women waiting for educational opportunity to manifest itself. Oh, the tragedy of it that only one girl out of every hundred, or only thirteen out of every thousand, gets any education in India! The disgrace of this state of affairs is appalling, nay, criminal, when one thinks how in the West 90 girls out of every 100 get a good, free and compulsory education lasting at least eight years. In addition there is the insult shown to the feminine side in the fact that for every 13 girls educated there are 138 boys provided with schooling, that is, over ten times as much attention is paid to boys in India in one of the most vital points of the Nation's life than is paid to girls—a suicidal policy indeed! for the result is that of every 100 boys who wish to march forward, 90 will be held back by the illiteracy of their untaught girl-wives.

Ignorance makes slaves. Slave-mothers produce craven children. The ignorance and enslaved conditions of later Roman motherhood

brought about the fall of the great Roman Empire. There is a Western saying, "Educate that you may be free". Foremost, then, among the race-regenerators and nation-builders will be those large-minded persons who work for the education of women.

Not only do common-sense and common science demonstrate the desirability, nay, the absolute necessity of greater education and greater freedom of body and soul for women, but all the Indian religions support this ideal of the equal comradeship of the masculine and the feminine. Time was in India when she could boast of her daughters as women of individuality, power and capability, women who were no mere shadows of men, but sturdy human souls, equalling men, with full freedom for self-expression. Indian women to-day must follow their example, nerving themselves to face and fight all forms of national evil, such as selfishness, intemperance, and immorality; emulating their self-reliance; thinking for themselves, ashamed to be hung any longer like mill-stones round the necks of their male relations, but, instead, offering their own free services to their Motherland with their own

distinctive views concerning the solution of national problems. The Nation is but the larger household. The motherhood-spirit is wanted in its administration. Men are not mothers and fathers combined! Let them not arrogate all public service to themselves, but leave opportunities for public service as well as private service open to women. Now, when schemes of self-government are being developed, let no artificial man-made barriers and restrictions be placed in the way of woman's free entry into the political, religious and social life of the country. She may not be ready yet for it, but the path must not be in a state of blockade and of vested sex-prejudice when she reaches the point at which her spirit and influence of motherhood overflows from the private life to the mothering of the national family. God alone may put bounds to the progress of the human soul whether it functions in a male or female body. Let neither sex arrogate to itself that Divine right of restriction, but let *freedom* and *equal opportunity, mutual encouragement*, *respect* and *recognition* form the foundations of a new era of comradeship of

men and women in the land sacred with the memory of heroes and heroines. Then only will India realise the value of the gifts her women can bring to her altar, and the impoverishment of her national life that is now taking place owing to the false conditions under which they have to live—conditions so bad that instinctively no man wants to be reborn a woman; and woman herself depreciates or is ignorant of her own value, acquiesces in wrong ideas of herself as 'temptress,' 'unclean' and secondary, instead of realising the honour and responsibility that are given to her by the Creator.

It will not always be so, and those who work for the day of her coming into her full kingdom are amongst the blessed pioneers of humanity.

CHAPTER III

INDIAN MARRIAGE—ACTUAL AND IDEAL

MARRIAGE is primarily a relationship symbolical of the Divine union between Soul and Spirit, and its spiritual purpose is to be the means by which the united man and woman may realise Divinity during earth life. Secondarily, it is the universal method in organised social life for regulating the natural attraction to each other of the sexes for companionship, and because in the order of nature their differences in quality must be linked together in order to bring about a sense of emotional satisfaction and the best results in human activity. Then the consummation of this desire for unity is made use of by the Lord of the World for the continuance of the species, though experience proves that there may be equal happiness in a marriage relation

without physical progeny. In general practice amongst us, however, the order of its objects has been reversed, and the first place in marriage is given to the importance of physical union and of immediate reproduction; the next (and only dimly in the East) to the ideal companionship and equal co-operation of the sexes in all the affairs of life; and in theory now, and generally in practice, marriage, alas, actually becomes a stumbling-block to the attainment of spiritual vision.

In no land does marriage enter so continuously into the daily thought of the people as in India. At the very moment of the birth of a child, the sigh of relief if it happens to be a boy, the sigh of disappointment if a girl, largely arises from the connection in thought with the necessary later marriage of the infant. As the child grows up, the parents are constantly haunted by the difficulty of gathering together the dowry for the daughter, or of seeking where a wealthy girl may be found whose money will help to educate or set up the son. The present customs in Indian life regarding marriage on the money side form one of the influences that are changing

spiritual, "other-worldly" Indians into materialistic, calculating, sordid sellers and buyers of youthful flesh and blood.

Then as the boy grows up, just when he is most interested in his studies he is ordered by his parents to come and be married: his time is broken into; his attention to his studies is distracted; his awakened conscience in these days is torn between desire for retention of his Brahmacharya, rightful obedience to his parents, and the effect of his conduct on some young girl. The struggle of ideals usually proves too much for the young man, and he is driven by circumstances unwillingly to participate in marriage, thinking of it as a burden, as indeed it becomes in such cases. Thus all his student life is permeated with thoughts relating to marriage, and when at length he begins to earn his own living, he is probably a father, and the vicious circle of thought and action recommences at a further stage.

The case of the little girl is still worse. She constantly hears her parents talking about her marriage and its cost. She realises what a burden she is to them. Many sensitive little girls feels this most acutely, though they may

not go to the length of Snehalata who committed suicide rather than put her parents to hardship on her account. I noticed recently a little girl of about twelve looking aged, anxious and depressed on returning to school after a summer holiday. On enquiry, I found that it was due to the disappointment of fruitless searching all the two months for a husband for her who would fulfil all the caste and dowry qualifications.

Even when the husband is secured there is the continual fear regarding the boy's health in the case of children married very young, lest the little girl be left a widow. (There are 350,000 widows under fifteen years of age in India at present.) Then there is always the remembrance of a possible hard, unsympathetic and tyrannical mother-in-law who plays a greater part than the future husband in the girl's thoughts of marriage.

There is also that fatal arrest of all mental development as the girl comes near "her age," a criminal custom only equalled by its climax, the snatching of the girl the moment she attains puberty, and the forcing of motherhood on her—just as she turns fourteen! After

the age of twelve she is withdrawn from school, and from then till the moment when she attains puberty, she is confined and guarded like a prisoner, and jealously watched for fear her chastity might have even the breath of scandal passed over it, and her marriage be in any way interfered with. She is discouraged from learning anything, except perhaps cooking. I know cases in which even accomplishments such as music are looked at askance. She is not allowed to move outside her own street, hardly beyond her parents' house. Her companions are limited. She gets practically no physical exercise. All but the dullest girls suffer from reduced vitality, depressed spirits, and much suppressed rebellion of the mind at a state of affairs which they instinctively feel to be wrong and unnatural. As in the sacred name of Religion people have been tortured and murdered, so in the holy name of chastity and marriage, the bodies, minds and souls of all the young Muhammadan and caste girls of India are starved and dwarfed. Their bodies are deprived of air and motion and contact with nature; their minds are denied knowledge of

books, or free human contact; their souls are wounded by the repression of all their impulses towards free self-expression, and by the denial of the wide experiences of life without which life becomes meaningless. The result is that these young girls are in the worst condition possible when "custom" forces them into the sexual embrace of an almost unknown husband, and in an agony of shyness, self-consciousness and fear the first-born, the continuer of the race, is conceived.

In a state of weakness and sickness, the little freedom that the married girl has restored to her during this first year of marriage is not of much avail, and the immature young system gives way under the strain of child-bearing and the prevailing unhygienic conditions of child-birth, and the little girl-mother's life is sacrificed to the selfish snatching at salvation by the elders of the family through the production of a male child at the earliest possible moment to perform the parents' death ceremonies! Daily one hears of such deaths of tender girl-wives who, in any other land, would have had an unfettered girlhood in which to consolidate all the sex-adjustments of their

bodies, and to grow strong enough to become happy and healthy creators of a strong race of children. Statistics show that between the ages of 15 and 30 the number of women who die is 1,232 as compared with 1,000 male deaths.

Even amongst those girls who are strong enough to survive all these customs and continue an ordinary married life, there is a minimum of companionship between the husband and wife probably until the girl is over thirty, and by that time she has become such a recognised inhabitant of the kitchen that she has lost the power and the interest to bridge the gulf of years of "customs," and become his true partner; and the same holds good of him. Finally the marriage resolves itself into an unbreakable association of one accounted superior, bound to protect and support an inferior, with one whose ignorance makes her dependent, helpless and incapable. Of course fear of the effects of public opinion is what binds the pair as mill-stones round one another's necks. It is really neither religion nor a sense of duty. Even if conditions become intolerable and they agree between themselves to separate, the girl's people may

object to her return because of the talk of relatives and neighbours; the husband may fear that he will be so misunderstood and misrepresented that he may even be outcasted; so the marriage relationship is continued despite its hollowness and misery, and its mockery of marriage as it ought to be.

This is but a bare outline of the general conditions of marriage in India to-day. It could be reinforced by shocking details at every step, such as the sexual excesses of many youths, the bad temper and attempts at disobedience of the girls, the appalling infant mortality, the wife-beating, the intrigue and passion bred of lack of mutual trust and respect; and, underlying all, the colossal arrogance of masculine humanity claiming for itself all the attributes and worship belonging to Gods, and demanding unquestioning obedience from the feminine half,—conduct which is utterly subversive of the great truth that Shiva and Parvati are equal though dissimilar halves of the one Divine Being, a relationship that human life should reflect.

Marriage gives no right to a man to ill-treat his wife, to enforce obedience on her, to beat

her, to keep her in ignorance, to make a common drudge of her. It gives her no right to stand in his way of progress or reform, to wear out his life with nagging, to keep him bound by her laziness, incapacity, superstition or conservatism. Neither must marriage be legalised licence, ruinous to body and soul, wrongly enforced as a duty or a necessity. Such things belong to the reign of the human brute. True marriage is sacred, and divorce is against all occult and spiritual law ; but it can never be right to continue living with a partner who degrades you, or prevents you from calling your soul your own. Dignified and calm separation by mutual agreement is the lesser evil, and more worthy of rational human beings than angry and irritating disunion. Mistakes when made ought not to be persisted in if circumstances can be so arranged as to maintain an honourable living for both parties.

The greatest admiration must be accorded to the great mass of people who, in face of such difficult conditions of marriage, patiently bear bodily suffering and mental deprivation ; who carefully protect and with difficulty support their households ; who pull together to the

best of their ability so that the wedded state may be kept intact and that their children may be decently brought up. When there has been so much that is great and honourable under present customs, what will not be possible in improved conditions? Even in the *best* ordinary home-lives there is plainly to be seen now an unnecessary impoverishment of the health, the affections, the spiritual life, which every lover of the Indian people longs to remedy.

Having thus reviewed the marriage state in the generality of cases, let us bring to mind the ideals of marriage stated and inherent in the Vedas, and also realised in India in olden times, and largely in other countries at present. The present time is the lowest point in the Kali Yuga, and no one must despair because things are so bad now, but realise instead that as certain as is the ebb tide, so certain also will be the flowing tide, and ours is the privilege of hailing it, giving news of it, and hastening it. As in Christianity with the Curse of Eve there was also the prophecy of its removal in due course, so will India also return to her better ways in the days at hand.

The new spirit of desire to serve the Motherland will have to realise that unless it learns to respect and treat properly the mothers of the future, all the talk about Motherland is cant and self-illusion.

There are no more fundamental politics than the methods of regulating one's daily conduct in every detail of the family life. As is the individual, so will be the family; as is the family, so will be the State. High politics are National Housekeeping, and assuredly there can be nothing more than small instalments of Home Rule or national freedom given by *karma* so long as those who have rule in the Indian homes deny freedom and mental development to their sons or daughters, or while students who talk largely of patriotism and service to the Motherland actually forbid their girl-wives to continue their studies after the age of twelve, or even at the best fail to encourage them. One speaks of the generality; there are noble exceptions, but they are notably exceptions.

No one has better analysed the attitude and ideal of the Vedas to marriage than Pandit A. Mahadeva Sastri, ex-State Librarian of Mysore, a Sanskrit scholar of the highest honour. He

says that the Hindu Religion holds up an ideal of marriage superior to all others, though unfortunately the practice has become degraded. The very high ideal it lays down, when faithfully complied with, has produced even to the present time instances of ideally married couples bound together for the spiritual service of the world. Everyone knows the ideal of equal comradeship vowed at the pacing together by husband and wife of the seven steps: "Become thou now my partner, as thou hast paced all the seven steps with me . . . Apart from thee I cannot live. Apart from me do thou not live. We shall live together; we each shall be an object of love to the other; we shall be a source of joy each unto the other; with mutual goodwill shall we live together, sharing alike all goods and power combined." These are the words which embody the true Aryan ideal of a marriage, but they were composed at an age prior to eras of foreign conquest, at an age when women were as well educated as men, when they were great students of the Vedas, when they had the right to perform sacrifices, when they were

free to renounce marriage altogether, when the husband was above twenty-four and the wife over sixteen, when the girl had the right to choose whom she would take as husband, as in the cases of Sita, Draupadi and Damayanti, and, having herself made the choice, proved afterwards a model of faithfulness, helpfulness and self-sacrifice, as the true partner of her husband. These words, repeated now to a child-wife, are almost blasphemy, a mockery of the implied conditions of understanding, capacity and freedom of circumstance of both husband and wife. They were never meant to be said to a child under ten years of age who cannot possibly comply with them, and who, just after having promised not to live apart, is immediately separated from her husband, and returns to her parents' house.

The ideals of marriage stated in the Rig Veda are worthy of being followed by every nation in the world; indeed it is sad to think that high-caste India is further from following them in many ways than any of the western civilisations. Analysing the Vedic marriage ritual, Pandit Mahadeva Sastri says that

the words used in taking the seven steps show that husband and wife enter on the duties of married life, not as mere novices, but both as responsible persons, having had a full previous training. "Woman is to be man's comrade in life, his *Sakhī*, with the same range of knowledge and interests, mature in body, mind and understanding, able to enter into a purposeful union on equal terms with a man of equal status, as life partner, of her own free choice, both dedicating their life-work as service to the Divine Lord of the Universe, both ready to fulfil the purpose of married life from the very day of marriage onwards." The rule which says that men and women of the same *Varna* should marry implies that they both have chosen the same special line of work as the dominant concern of their married life by which they have determined to seek and to serve God—either by the rearing of progeny, the development of natural resources, the education of the young, or the pure spiritual life. In order to obtain the best results in this co-operation, the *Gotra* of each should be different, and this Mr. Mahadeva Sastri interprets as meaning

that the religious temperaments of the two should be unlike, such as the temperament suited to the *karma-marga*, *jnana-marga*, or *bhakti-marga.*

Thus the Vedic ideal of marriage discloses itself as an adult and freely chosen partnership of a man and woman having identity of aim though difference of method in attaining it, and presupposes that the woman is as well educated both secularly and religiously as the man. What a perfect type of that ideal of marriage were Mr. and Mrs. Browning, the great English poet and poetess, and are Mr. and Mrs. Gandhi in our own day in India!

The true Aryan marriage is something far broader and deeper than the continuance of the race, or the production of a male child to perform *Shradhas*, or the satisfaction of the sex-desire nature; and it certainly is not in the terms of a letter which I recently saw from an undergraduate to his father-in-law demanding his fourteen-year-old wife. "I am determined to have my wife. I need her services"—services!—particularly as he also commanded that she should give up at once her music and her general studies.

God has made man and woman as complements of the one Divine Self manifesting itself in two slightly different forms, and it is right and natural that there should be a power of attraction between the sexes; and even that, as the lower animals have attained the best results in the process of evolution by "natural selection," so also the human animal, helped still further by its reason and intuition, should base its marital relations on a spontaneous affection and respect, not worked up at the command of a parent, but welling up from natural associations and ties, mental and spiritual. But in order to make this free choice a practical possibility, there must be more normal and unfettered companionship between the young men and women of the country. It will take some time to establish this condition, but come about it certainly shall, in this land, as it has done in others. The present division of the sexes in all the affairs of life is unnatural to the last degree, and is one of the causes of the backwardness of modern India. The best qualities in each sex are drawn out by the presence of the other, save where the brute nature reigns supreme, and I have

greater faith in the chastity of Indian young women than conventional thought credits them with. I cannot believe that Indian young people, if given the freedom of comradeship granted to young people in the West, would prove themselves less worthy of it or abuse it. The present attitude of the elders to their young people is a veiled insult which the latter should resent.

In order to raise the present ideal of marriage to the level of ancient days, when the Rishis moved in Bharatavarsha and taught its people directly, many changes will have to be made in the attitude, thought, and practice of the Indian people regarding marriage.

For the rescue of the race from physical degeneration, from premature old age individually, from wastage of child life, from the grip of nervous diseases, a move must be made by the parents towards raising the age of marriage for their girls and boys. The easiest steps to this will be along the path of extended time and facilities for the education of girls (else weeds will grow up between the ages of twelve and sixteen in the uncultivated soil of the girl's mind), and along the path of

exclusion from all high class and National schools and colleges of married young men students. Pressure also must be brought to bear to get a Bill passed legalising post-puberty marriages.

The growing desire throughout the youth of the country, and the elders also to a large extent, to serve their country faithfully, can find its expression in a greater patriotic and religious consecration of the united lives of the husband and wife to the service of God and the Motherland. This would bring about naturally that equal standard of sex-morality and conduct which must be the goal of all who are interested in this subject. People usually forget that when they insist on absolute chastity in women, but allow men to be unfaithful, they are condemning a portion of womanhood to the worst life of unchastity. There cannot be licence for men without the worst consequences to both the chaste and the prostitute women. It is quite as necessary for the husband to be chaste as the wife—a natural law that is not palatable to either West or East at this present stage of social order which has been evolved almost

solely by men. This mutual consecration will also ensure that there shall be more equal rights of parentage than at present exist under the English law, where there is only one parent—the father where the child is legitimate, the mother where it is illegitimate! And of course in the ordinary married life there will be a greater respect for the wife and deeper devotion between both, due not merely to the dictates of religious convention or stimulated sentiment, but the consequence of freedom of individual choice in the initial step, more equal mental development, more mature and equal ages, and greater conscious inter-dependence for impersonal ends.

But daily in the transition time the pioneer souls will suffer. The young men who refuse to marry, at their father's or mother's command, some child of whom they know nothing; the young boys and girls who rebel entirely against marriage; the girls who plead for more education; those women who, unable to stand degrading conditions, leave their husbands,—all need support and encouragement; and it is more and more borne in on me that some association or philanthropic

body must raise some fund to support and educate such rebels when they are turned out of their homes, until they are trained to earn their living. Such an institution would give courage to many conscience-torn young people, and enable a better stand to be made against the persistence of an order of marriage customs that the laws of nature, national economics, reason, sentiment and intuition, all condemn.

Patriotic parents have a field of national service ready at hand in doing their share in reforming the present customs of marriage. As a first practical but partial step they should decide never to marry their children young; never to allow their daughters to live with their husbands till after they are at least sixteen, the years till then being given to a good education; and in the case of their boys they must ask for no dowry. By courage and steadfastness in performing this essential duty to their Motherland, the sad and widespread cases of virgin widows would be quickly and quietly ended; the degrading practice of selling human beings to the highest bidder in the marriage market would be a stain wiped off

the fair fame of India; the physique of the next generation would be improved.

"Marriage is a curse in our land!" exclaimed a high caste Brahmana to me. "But it need not be," I replied. "If only its preceding conditions are improved, it may be the greatest blessing in the world." Let us imagine such an ideal Indian marriage: Indian boys and girls, young men and young women, freely and innocently attending school and college together, meeting in a natural way in all Indian festivities; an affinity discovered; . . . the parents' blessing obtained; . . . a betrothal for a period during which each learns to know the other better before the irrevocable step is taken. Then comes the happiness of marriage at an adult age, with freedom of companionship, co-operation in plans for private and public service, probably home-making in a house of their own; and, when the foundations of this united life are well laid with the blessing of consecration to Brahma, choice of motherhood by the wife, the coming of children, the care and love of them, father and mother equally able to help them in their studies; good health,

intelligence, respect, peace and piety in the home. What a centre of power for the upliftment of India!—and not impossible of attainment.

> Never will peace and human nature meet
> Till free and equal, man and woman greet
> Domestic peace . . .

Those who even now are experiencing the unchanging happiness of a union rooted in deep self-discovered love, grounded in mutual mental respect, bound together by perfect mutual freedom of action, rising high above personal differences in the search for truth, branching out in many lines of individual, family and national service, bearing the blossoms of beauty of life and the fruit of "generations of exalted deeds" and fine heredity; such people know that it is indeed true that marriage is a state in which "joys are doubled and sorrows are halved". For such couples there can be no possibility of separation or divorce either in this or other lives.

Knowing such marriages not only to be "made in Heaven" but to be the nearest state to heaven on earth—the completion of the two

halves of the human circle—happily married people ache at seeing the misery of the marriages around them, brought about under different conditions, and they are impelled by their own happiness to try and persuade others to rise to the ideal, and for the sake of the Individual, the Race, the Motherland and Religion, make such new conditions of marriage as will bring back again the days of Yagnavalkya and Maitreyi, of Rama and Sita, of Shiva and Parvati.

CHAPTER IV

INDIAN WOMEN AND FREEDOM

I HAVE lived in India for over six years. I have always loved the Indian people. I have had the great privilege of mixing very intimately with their home life. I have tried to find the best points in their habits and customs. I have had special opportunities of contacting the lives led by women in all but two of its Provinces. But, with all the good-will in the world, my daily growing experience of India brings with it a daily growing knowledge that, when compared with the freedom of thought, word and action in which the women of other countries live, the women of India are the most fettered and cramped in the world to-day.

This statement does not apply to the women of the lower castes, such as the peasant class or the coolie class; neither does it apply to the

women of the West Coast nor to Bombay; but, with variations in degree, and with notable exceptional groups and individuals, I am convinced of its truth. The majority of those affected do not realise the limitations of their lives. They have seen nothing different; or where they see it in the case of Britishers, it is so far removed from anything practical for them at the moment that it is without appeal to them. Yet to those who desire to serve India and who have seen what may be the fulness of women's lives in other civilisations both East and West, in Burma, Japan, America and Europe, no movement connected with the freedom of India seems more fundamentally necessary than the Freedom for Women Movement. Not all the Governments in the world can give India true *swaraj* if Indians themselves, men and women, do not remove the chains of out-of-date custom that hold the higher class Indian women in impoverishment of body, mind and soul.

For Northern women and for all Muhammadan women the *purdah* or zenana system is the gaoler. For South Indian and non-*purdah* women it is the early-marriage system and its

concomitant, the exaggeration of the idea of wifely obedience. Underlying all the limitations imposed on women is an appalling lack of faith in the higher and purer nature of men and women. The men seem to think that the sight and companionship of women would tempt them beyond control, or each man thinks that while *he* would be all right, no other man could be trusted to speak to his women-folk, and especially not the men of his own station in life! The women are brought up to look on men (other than father, husband or brother) as their natural enemies. They also have lack of faith in their own sex. What a vicious circle! For the prevention of a few errant human beings all women are "cribbed, cabined and confined" and a poisonous atmosphere permeates all Indian life. I believe that this mutual fear is a miasma, a legacy from a time of military conditions, and it is an unfounded slur on both sexes in the present day.

The zenana system prevents free and natural physical exercise such as walking; it promotes bad health and especially consumption through lack of fresh air and sunlight; it arrests the

development of the body; it still more arrests the development of the mind. I might have thought it was my own point of view that was at fault in so strongly condemning a foreign system, if it were not for the appeals that have been made to me personally by those who live in the zenanas. "We are in prison," said an intelligent group of ladies belonging to one family. And even as they spoke, one of them slid back into an adjoining room because her brother-in-law had joined us and she must not be seen by him! At the end of a *purdah* meeting that I held, a young Muhammadan woman came right up from the audience to where I had stood and clasping her hands together made a piteous appeal to us in Hindi to come to the help of the women behind the *purdah*. "You educate us till we are ten or twelve, and then we are pushed behind the curtains and no one cares any more about us, and we long for further knowledge but we are in chains." When I drove in the curtained and boxed-in *purdah* school conveyances, I felt for myself the sense of suffocation, the close air, the impoverishment of education that came from the absence of stimulation induced by the sights and sounds

of the life of common humanity in the streets. I also saw for myself that even amongst the orthodox older ladies, who probably would assert their approval of the *purdāh*, human nature and natural curiosity assert themselves, for they took every opportunity to peep through the slits and small mica openings in the coverings of our motor-car, and enjoyed every excuse for getting a drive or a change from their houses. I also came across a number of instances where ladies who kept strict *purdah* in their native towns had no hesitation in moving about freely and uncurtained in a strange town.

As for disease, and especially consumption, it is rampant among the inmates of the zenanas. A doctor of a royal household himself told me of the case of the death of a junior princess which might have been prevented if only the doctors had been allowed to see her in time and diagnose from the eye. They had been permitted only to feel her pulse, her hand being thrust through a curtain. When she was at death's door they saw her face and recognised the true nature of her disease which they would have been able to cure had they

known it earlier! She was one of the many victims to this unnatural system.

In the South, while there is more freedom of movement, women seem to have to ask "permission" before they make any new move. This is not the case with adult women in other countries. It is the natural result of the child-wife system. The husband feels himself as much father as husband to his little girl-wife, and it is hard for both of them to get out of the wrong relationship when she grows up. The wrong atmosphere it engenders about marriage was exemplified to me when, in reply to my enquiries about his newly-wed wife aged ten, a college student replied with pride, "I think she will be very obedient".

More and more the whole world is coming to realise the right and the necessity of the soul to freedom of opportunity for self-expression. Self-determination is a necessity for the individual man or woman as much as for the caste, class or nation. The whole Time-spirit is working towards the liberation of woman in every country, but along different lines according to the different civilisations. How can we help it in its work in India?

There are seven million more men than women in India, therefore it follows as a national service that every woman should marry, and it is the way to freedom for married women that we have to seek. It has been found along one road in places so far removed as Malabar and Burma. There it has come through economic freedom. Land and property lie in the hands of women entirely amongst the West Coast women, and money is made almost entirely by women in Burma: they are the shopkeepers of their nation. We may call that the power of the purse.

There are four great Liberators standing ready to aid women to freedom. They are Religion, Education, Patriotism and Love.

There is an atmosphere of freedom for women in all centres of pilgrimage and holiness. Benares City and the holy Ganges are graduating colleges in emancipation for the women of the *purdah*-keeping Provinces! What a breath of fresh air and fresh vitality comes to every woman who goes on a religious pilgrimage! What equality and what absence of sex-consciousness there is for women as they bathe ceremonially in holy

rivers North or South! The freest woman in the world probably is the authentic *sannyasini*. It is one of the astounding paradoxical surprises of paradoxical and self-contradictory India to see the most veiled and sheltered of *purdah* women on dry land, suddenly appearing without any shyness or awkwardness in the Ganges or the Jamna side by side with men of all kinds. If only all life be looked on as a pilgrimage, if the home be regarded as a holy place, if only the spiritual attitude is taken of soul helping soul rather than of sex vehicles ready to prey on one another, then the burden of sex limitation will be lifted from the shoulders of fettered womanhood and suspicious manhood.

Education is a liberating influence of the greatest importance. A trained and well-furnished mind gives its owner self-confidence, discrimination, a proper comparative sense of values, and independence necessary as an accompaniment to greater freedom of action, responsibility and movement. Ignorance is weakness, knowledge is power. We have to pull up the percentage of literate women from the present shameful two per cent to 92. It

is a task of supreme importance and of almost paralysing magnitude, but it has been done by other nations and it must be accomplished by the various Indian Provinces. In Kashmir the desire to help women along this path to freedom has sprung up so strongly that a band of volunteers has been formed of young men who have pledged themselves to teach the reading and writing of their vernacular to the women of their families. It was started in Srinagar, and in two months 450 Kashmiri primers were purchased. If this type of national service will only spread and fire the imagination and the zeal of those who have themselves had the privilege of education, a long step on the road to the freedom of womanhood and the freedom of India will have been taken. The present rate of growth of education amongst women is far too slow. The mother should be the *guru* of the child; instead, if we bring a notice of a meeting to a lady in her home, she has to call out for her little Ramaswami or her little Sushila, and the child reads out the notice; the child is now the *guru* of the mother—truly it is the Kali Yuga! But when women are able to read for themselves scriptures, books of travel,

biographies, novels and newspapers, what an expansion of consciousness there will be! How the mental horizon will widen, what freedom of thought will be stimulated that later will express itself in insistence on the necessary freedom of action for the manifestation of the growing soul!

Patriotism is playing an important part in emancipating Indian women. I remember how they were stirred to their depths by the internment of Mrs. Besant, and I walked with a large number of them in a public procession of men and women in honour of her release. Things have gone very swiftly for women as well as men since then, and now even Muhammadan women, like the mother of the Ali brothers, the political leaders, have come right out of the zenana as their sacrifice to their patriotism. Whether we approve of their political policy or not, it is a wonderful fact that women's ardent desire for the freedom of their country has given them such personal freedom that they are now welcomed into the open streets as volunteers, as pickets, as politicians. "Causes save one," remarked a wise woman once. This is particularly true of women. Their line of least resistance is

self-sacrifice. They do not naturally move towards fighting for their own freedom, but through throwing themselves into a "cause" they achieve their own liberation. The "cause," however, must itself be related to the attainment of some aspect of progress or emancipation. The Indian national movement cannot progress without the aid of women: the liberation of women will be aided by their devotion to the national movement.

Finally—and primarily—there is the universal as well as personal Unlooser of all bonds—Love. If only there were deep, true love existing between each married adult man and woman in India, there would be no need for this chapter. "Perfect love casteth out fear." Where there is perfect love there is perfect faith and perfect equality. Suspicion, jealousy, domination, obedience, limitations, all disappear. Even the thought of freedom vanishes in the realisation of perfect partnership that is unity, not duality;

> Freedom that is fond of its own name
> Has not yet shed its chains, but perfect love
> Makes happy bonds that are but anchorage
> To the free soul.

CHAPTER V

THE SOUTHBOROUGH FRANCHISE COMMITTEE'S REPORT[1]

THERE is no gainsaying the fact that the War taught the western nations that they had been making a gross mistake in excluding their women from citizenship. Among the first steps in reconstruction taken by all the great nations has been the removal of the disqualification of sex, and a boldly free and full admission of women to the whole rights of direct representation. We are not concerned here with the various qualifications required from women voters differently by England, Russia, Austria, Canada, America, etc.; that is a matter of local adjustment. But all unitedly admitted that the sex barrier was out of

[1] This chapter, which is reprinted from "The Times of India," June, 1919, is included in this book to show some of the steps by which the demand for Woman Suffrage in India proceeded.

date, unworthy of the times, an anomaly, a thing to be got rid of at the first possible moment: and they smashed it up for good. Nor was the East untouched by the spirit of the times, for even in conservative China the women urgently claimed the vote. Knowing all this, the decision (in 1919) of the Southborough Franchise Committee and the Government of India to perpetuate this discredited sex-disqualification advertises to all the world that the views of these gentlemen are in this particular behind the times, that they consider Indian conditions behind the times, Indian women lagging behind all other women, and that they intend them and India to remain behind the times. Although this decision cannot be regarded as final, for the Government of India Despatch invites "further enquiry, and desires that the opinions of the public generally be obtained" on their proposals, it is a matter for infinite regret that the Committee in their first pronouncement failed so lamentably in up-to-date, reconstructive statesmanship in this fundamental aspect. Instead of profiting by the experience of other countries, they seek to launch the ship of

responsible self-government with a list towards masculine monopoly instead of with the equipoise of male and female co-operation. They have so little awakened to the seriousness of the subject that the Despatch dismisses the claims, rights, and responsibilities of one whole half of the population of India in two short sentences as if with a wave of the hand.

It is entirely significant, however, that the one member of the Government who knows Indian conditions from the inside, and is therefore most fitted to voice Indian opinion, Sir C. Sankaran Nair, opposed their view, and pressed for the removal of the sex disqualification from the outset. In the preceding paragraph to that on the Disqualifications it is stated that this, which is "the first electoral system set up in India," will probably remain fixed for a given time. They say: "We do not expect that the initial allotment will be abandoned until political life in India becomes more reconciled than it is at present to what we regard as a fundamental principle of responsible government, namely, the validity of a majority decision." Judging from this

pronouncement, if the Committee's proposals become law, women will be excluded from any share in their own government until some vague future date. It is on the following words that the political fate of womanhood in India (both eastern and western) is decreed: "In the present conditions of India we agree with them (the Southborough Committee's recommendations) that it is not practical to open the franchise to women." They have thrown their whole opposition to, and refusal of, women's immediate enfranchisement on the single ground that it is not "practical". No proof is given as to why it is not "practical". It is simply the dogmatic statement of seven English gentlemen in the Government of India.

As the motive of this article is not merely bitter attack, or righteous indignation, but constructive criticism and an attempt to change this most important detail of a scheme of Reforms which in other respects seems to have been thought out very carefully, it is essential that evidence should be shown in it that *it is practical* to admit women to the franchise *now* and to do as Sir C. Sankaran Nair

and Mr. Hogg desired—remove the sex disqualification at once.

It must always be remembered in discussing the question of this sex-disqualification, that there is no demand for the enfranchisement of *all* women; that the removal of the sex-disqualification would (judging by the analogy of the Municipal voting) give voting rights to at most about a million women out of the three hundred million odd population; that those women would largely be the most independent, the best educated, and the rate-and-tax-paying women in the country. Though small in number these women would be invaluable assets to public life, and their enfranchisement would remove from womanhood the stigma of inferiority, incapacity, or superiority to a desire for public service, all at present implied in her being classed in the Disqualifications with the criminals, lunatics and children of her country as unfit for citizenship.

When at this same juncture and in these social conditions the Governments of Bombay and Madras have found it "practical" to open the Municipal franchise to women, it cannot be truly said that the vote for the higher

elections could not also be exercised by them. In these Presidencies and their associated States there is no *purdah* system. With the encouragement of the women's societies which are springing up daily, and the interested instruction of male relatives, women voters would not be found backward in discharging their national duties. It is not the habit of woman to fail in her duty when she knows what is expected of her. It is sometimes forgotten that it was only after the grant of the vote to women in England that societies for instruction in citizenship sprang up. It would be almost entirely the women who are Municipal voters who would become voters for the Provincial Councils, and no practical difficulty stands in their way in these two large and progressive Presidencies. In Assam also the Chief Commissioner regards the matter as eminently practical. Neither the Madras Local Government nor the United Provinces Government opposed Women's Suffrage. The practical difficulty seems to arise entirely in the *purdah* districts of India, and no one seeks to minimise it; but it cannot be pointed out too often that in Australia, where women are

freer than perhaps anywhere in the world, women's votes were collected at their homes when suffrage was first granted, and this system with special women election officers can and must be followed in India for these special districts. An examination of page 270 of the Committee's Report will show how much special trouble can be taken to collect *men's* votes. Thus even in *purdah* parts the removal of sex-disqualification is practical. Neither the Southborough Committee nor the Indian Government alludes to this thoroughly feasible solution of the "seclusion of women" excuse for the postponement of women's enfranchisement.

The number of women who would be qualified, if equality of political opportunity be granted, will be probably about one million. Even if half of these did not vote, it is still no reason for denying it. From the Report we find that in some Districts not 40 per cent of the men voters used their right, and the number of University electors is less than a couple of thousand men. It is quite as practical that even a couple of thousand women should be given the vote to represent the

whole feminine thought and interests of the nation. The desire to obtain women's votes would have the very practical result of bringing forward reforms directly touching the interests of women and children which otherwise might have been long postponed.

The Southborough Franchise Committee disposes of the claims of women in four short paragraphs out of a volume of 400 pages. They admit that numerous petitions were sent to them on the subject; only one Local Government (Bengal) definitely opposed it, and then only as "premature;" and though they record that "no strong opposition was revealed by the evidence" (for none exists!) yet they decided (as against all the positive and little negative opinion,) "not to recommend the extension of the suffrage to women". This cannot be considered a fair decision; it is not in conformity with the proportion of evidence before them; it is in complete opposition to the will of the direct representatives of the Indian people as shown by the All-India Women's Deputation, many women's societies and political societies, and by the votes of over 5,000 delegates at the

Bombay and Delhi National Congresses in favour of the removal of sex-disability from all the terms of the Reform Scheme.

The Committee "are satisfied that the social conditions of India make it premature to extend the franchise to Indian women at this juncture, when so large a proportion of male electors require education in the use of a responsible vote". This reasoning is priceless in its absurdity—nothing less than a whole chapter would do justice to the masculine logic which argues that, because some men are too ignorant to vote, therefore it is too soon for any women to have the vote!

Their second argument is that until the *gosha* system "is relaxed, female suffrage would hardly be a reality" (probably only hundreds of years hence!) This argument only holds because the solution of the difficulty of collecting votes has not been seriously considered. In Bengal, for instance, there are hundreds of lady graduates in *purdah* who would be better qualified to vote than many men, if the method suggested is adopted. "Where there's a will there's a way." This also answers their objection "that grave

difficulties would be involved in the actual recording of votes". The whole question of Indian franchise bristles with grave difficulties. They are grappled with in the case of men. It is grossly unfair to refuse to overcome them in the case of women, especially when a practical working precedent has already been shown by another country.

For these four reasons, each with not a leg to stand on when "practically" enquired into, these four Englishmen, two Brahmanas and one Muhammadan Sahibzada "propose to disqualify women". One other Englishman boldly dissented, and in a true Liberal spirit advised that the "sex-disqualification should be removed at the outset of responsible government in India". The others do not boldly oppose woman suffrage on principle, they probably recognise that the world has gone too far ahead in thought now for that to be publicly expressed, but they take shelter in a friendly paternal pat on the back to the petitioners, men and women, and say in effect: "Very good, my children, but I have nothing for you today. Come again to-morrow." It is the same old story of: "Wait

and see," but India cannot afford to wait. She must take her place at once side by side with other Nations in the Empire. The honourable position of women must be upheld in the first great step in the National Charter—the Reform Bill.

The Indian deputations to England must press for it with all their power, supported by the women voters, the Labour Party and the Liberals. They will be supplied with facts from India which can controvert the objections of the Committee. It is the duty of every lover of Indian honour and every respector of Indian womanhood to work for the reversion of this decision in the Reform Bill itself.

In no country is this sweeping disqualification of sex to be less tolerated than in India, whose history shows that the women who so desired were given, without any barriers of man-made legal restrictions, the fullest opportunity to serve in the religious life, on the battle-field, in the councils of their people, in all the public life.

To this modern Temple of the Motherland—its political life—the women who so desire must be allowed to bring their offerings of

thought and service, and the way must be opened at once. No "practical" purpose is effected by remaining "behind the times" in postponing a permissive, not compulsory, right of self-expression.

CHAPTER VI

SUFFRAGE DEBATES—A STUDY IN CONTRASTS

HUMANITY is a strange creature. It does most unexpected things. The debates on Woman Suffrage in Madras in April and in Poona in July, 1921, are an instance in point. Except for the exertions of one woman's organisation, the Women's Indian Association, it could not be maintained that women in the Madras Presidency were advanced enough or organised enough to show a very strong demand for the legislative vote, and yet it took only an hour and a half's debate to show that the Madras Council was preponderatingly in favour of granting woman suffrage. On the contrary, though Bombay is noted everywhere for the advanced education and free status of its womanhood, and although as many as nineteen women's associations in Bombay City alone had combined

in a large public meeting to demand the vote, and four splendid meetings were held in Poona at one of which there were over eight hundred women present and all enthusiastic, yet in the Bombay Council it took three days of hard verbal fighting to wear down the opposition against granting the women's claims.

I had the good fortune to be present at each of these historic debates, and in almost every detail there was a most interesting contrast to be noted. In setting, in atmosphere, in both men and women, they were different. It is a fruitful psychological study for someone to follow up. I shall merely state facts as they impressed me.

First, as regards the Council Chambers. Interiorly the Madras chamber carries off the palm for artistic effect, impressive dignity and well-planned arrangement. To mention only two points to the detriment of the Poona chamber, the exit door for members is behind the President's chair, and it must trouble him considerably to be constantly interrupted by those exit and entrance bows of Members which he so rigorously demands; another

point is that there is not even a strip of matting on the hard-paved floor, and the boots of the Members made a horrid clatter every time any one moved in or out. I noticed with a smile that one hybridly-garmented Mahratta Member had by the second day safeguarded himself from self-consciousness by the application of gleamingly noticeable rubber heels. There are no division lobbies in Poona. Votes are recorded in curtained corners that reminded one of a medium's cabinet at a spiritualistic seance. One realised the superiority of the several doors on each side of the Madras chamber, and the utility of beauty in the latter chamber's arrangement and colour scheme.

But exteriorly the setting of the Poona chamber is more delightful than the dingy surroundings of Fort St. George in which the Madras chamber is situated. In Poona there is a large garden full of roses and other flowers, with fine shady trees and an impressive drive. The architecture of the building is also distinctive. It is one of the residences of the Governor of Bombay, the *levee* hall of which is being lent for the Council purposes. I should think that it will not be long before

the Councillors build a more suitable chamber, especially if they pay a visit to the Southern Presidency.

At the Madras debate nothing had struck me more than the absence of Westerners. There were only four present then, and even they seemed to be shrinking into invisibility. Noticeably too there was an overwhelming majority of non-Brahmanas, and only eight Muhammadan members. It was strikingly an assembly of representative Indians, having power to rule their land with a minimum of interference from foreigners. How different it was in Poona! By atmosphere, by power of oratory, by the largeness of their numbers, and the importance of the posts they held, the Englishmen seemed to dominate the proceedings; perhaps not really so, but that is the impression one got during that debate. Then also there were the groupings of Parsis, of Gujeratis, of Sindhis, of Mahrattas, of Muhammadans. While in Madras we heard only one speaker using his mother-tongue, in Poona quite a number of speeches were made in quite a number of vernaculars, and at one time the President himself had to use some vernacular

to explain things to a number of Members who did not know a word of English. There is a greater feeling of homogeneity in the Madras Council; though it also has its share of different peoples.

As regards the procedure in Council, the Bombay President seemed to be far stricter than the Madras one, but perhaps that was because Mr. Whyte, President of the Imperial Assembly, was present on those days to see for himself how things were conducted. No slip in etiquette missed the eagle eye of the Poona President. Often one felt glad one did not stand in the shoes of the offenders, so severely righteous was the calling to order. Nevertheless he was unexpectedly democratic in his consultation with the House as to its desire and counsel on many points that arose. Sir Narayan Chandavarkar is an admirable combination of President and Speaker, the latter in the sense that he is the spokesman of the sense of the House. We women visitors were much impressed by his combination of power and sweet reasonableness. With regard to the Madras President I cannot speak, as his place was filled by the

Deputy President on the day of the Madras debate.

The atmosphere of the debates themselves was very different. In Madras there was a sense of tension and anxiety on the women's part for only half an hour after the proposer's speech. From that time onward, except from the Muhammadan members, the sitting became an accumulation of appreciation of womanhood and of faith in giving it the fullest opportunities for expressing itself in any and every way it desired. Only three Members thought the question premature, one being one of the English Members of the Executive Council, and even he did not press the point. The only other western speaker, a Scotsman, strongly supported the resolution. The pervading tone in Madras was a blend of sentiment, abstract principle, and religious reverence for womanhood.

In Poona the debate stretched over three days, and the first day's sitting was a five hours' accumulation of gloomy opposition utterly unexpected. The mover of the Resolution had not given perhaps enough strong reasoning in his opening speech, and the

President took it so much for granted that the Council was in favour that he gave special chances to opposers to prove their case against. A quasi-philosophical, poetical, sentimental, but well delivered speech by a Westerner, the Registrar of Co-operative Societies, was given opposing the co-operation of men and women in public life (surely he is a contradiction in terms and a paradox!) His lead was followed by many, and especially by four other Englishmen who harped on the theme of postponement. In one case the speaker asserted that women always and everywhere were reactionaries, and to give a vote for this resolution was to give a vote for reaction. The injustice of this statement still hurts. The atmosphere in Poona was that of a combination of cautious business men who wanted to be sure in advance of the success of their venture, and of "wait and see" British politicians. These were all clear, articulate and clever speakers, and by their manner they almost pulled across the line the quieter and more intuitive or democratic supporting party. It was a tense mental tug-of-war, and it certainly would have been a toss-up which side would have won if the

division had been taken that evening. As in Madras, the Muhammadans as a body with a few exceptions were in opposition. The Parsis were strongly in favour. Other groups were divided.

On the second day, the Irishman who is one of the Executive Councillors saved the reputation for progress of the Westerners by his very forceful support, and got practically the first clear applause of the debate by his reference to Mrs. Ramabai Ranade (widow of the late Justice Ranade and President of the Seva Sedan) as one whose presence would honour, grace and help that Council or any other. I really think his speech turned the tide. After it the whole air seemed to lighten; the Members began to talk more sense, and ceased to commend unthinkingly the perpetuation of the *status quo* or to imagine eventualities of a terrifying nature. Facts founded on the results of the Municipal voting prevailed over fiction, and commonsense won the day. It was part of that same commonsense that decided most of the English members to abstain from voting in the division, as it was made clear to them as the debate went on that

this was a matter for the Indians to settle themselves. There was great jubilation when the voting actually took place and the figures were announced; 52 for, 25 against. When I happened to exclaim to the Members and friends afterwards in the lobby, "It was a good fight," they laughed, but that is really what it was. In Madras it was a walk-over, in Poona it was a victory.

The number of women who attended the Madras debate was comparatively small, and all through the women's previous campaign the co-operation of western women (with three exceptions) with their Indian sisters was conspicuously absent. It was most inspiring to find, contrariwise, in Poona over fifty western women, including the Bishop's wife, the General's wife, the Executive Councillors' wives, missionaries and teachers of all kinds keenly joining with the Hindu, Parsi, Muhammadan and Indian Christian women in enthusiasm for the women's cause; and the same is the case in Bombay and other cities of the Presidency. Over a hundred women attended the Poona debate, and ten times as many were eager to come if only there had been

accommodation for them. The presence and keenness of the women of all communities in the visitors' gallery had a good deal to do with the satisfactory result of the Bombay debate.

I think it was the women of the Bombay Presidency who were the greatest gainers by these debates, and the men of Madras Presidency; the former by the very real spirit of sisterhood that was developed among them and the amount of political education those three days gave them, and the latter by their unhesitating and ungrudging response to the spirit of the times.

Over 40 members spoke in the Bombay Council and 25 in Madras. Individually we women had equally fine and chivalrous knights in both Presidencies who championed our cause most ably both inside and outside the Chamber and to whom we feel most deeply grateful. Taken, however, as two contrasted assemblies of men in their attitude to the aspirations of their sisters for a free field and no favour, probably their own figures are their truest index, in Madras a majority of 37 in an attendance of 70 (52 per cent), and in Poona a majority 27 in an attendance of 92

(27 per cent). Bombay Presidency will do well to make up for a certain loss of prestige she has suffered in this matter by becoming the first Presidency to enforce compulsory education on girls equally with boys, or by putting some women on the Bombay Corporation at once.

The question which now arises is, "Which is going to be the next Province to enter the lists on behalf of its women—Bengal, the United Provinces, or the Panjab?"

CHAPTER VII

INDIAN WOMANHOOD TODAY

No country has a longer record of famous women than India. Its "Rig-Veda" is recognised as the oldest literary product in the world, and a number of the hymns or devotional poems included in it are admitted to have been written by women of the time.

In India's later mythological stories women are as noble and as free as the men. There is Sita, the emblem of faithfulness and devotion, yet having to submit to the ordeal of fire because the breath of scandal had played upon her; there is Gargi, famous as a religious dialectician, and Maitreyi, the lover of philosophy, who preferred the Sannyasi life in the forest in company with her husband to a life of wealth, ease and worldliness in her city household; there is Savitri who chose her own husband even against her parents' will, and

though she knew that he would live but one year, but whose courage, love and persistence won him back from the god of Death more successfully than did Orpheus his Eurydice.

Within historical times there was Padmini and all the women of her Court who deliberately threw themselves into the fire rather than risk dishonour from their enemies; there was the poetess-queen Mirabai; Nur-Jahan, the stateswoman who guided the policy of the Moghul Empire for more than a decade; Mumtaz Mahal, whose beauty inspired the love that became immortalised in the Taj Mahal; Ahalya, the great warrior queen; the Rani of Jhansi, who was the Joan of Arc of her dominion; and numbers of women right down to Snehalatha, the self-immolated victim of the dowry system, all of whom in the different parts of the semi-continent of India are honoured for their outstanding capacity in religion, statesmanship, rulership, philosophy, travel, imagination, courage, strength, gentleness, wise self-sacrifice, learning and beauty.

The stories perpetuate the fact that in those "good old times" women received the same opportunities for education and

self-expression as did the men, and that a free and untrammelled natural comradeship existed between men and women in India until the time of the Muhammadan invasion.

Then everything changed for Indian womanhood. Muhammadanism has a different philosophy of life and the hereafter from Hinduism. It secludes its women from the sight of all men save the husband; only to a veiled woman does it pay respect, and all its married women are so strictly guarded that not even to draw water from her well may a Muslim woman leave the zenana. Naturally when these people spread conqueringly over the land, carried away by the lust of war and power, they, like all militarist people in their moment of victory, came under the sway of their passions, and finding Indian women going about freely, and judging them by their own *purdah* standards, thought them loose women, and used them accordingly.

Their rule lasted five centuries, and during that time the Hindus of the North were driven in self-defence to introduce the *purdah* and early-marriage system. The panic of fear swept all older customs and wiser ways

before it, and never had war and conquest such a harvest of unnatural and far-reaching effects on the race concerned. Though the power of the Muslims has been dethroned for over a hundred and fifty years, still the obsession of sex-distrust holds sway over the higher castes of India. In them the men and women are so divided by interests, customs, outlook, lack of intercommunication, that they may be likened to two different races rather than the complementary halves of one race. Within these castes every man save the husband is tacitly regarded as the woman's potential enemy; every woman save the wife is looked on by the man as a probable temptress. Everywhere there is an exaggerated awareness of sex-consciousness which is the direct evil heritage of the militarist rule of a particularly masculine religion that even goes to the length of denying an individual soul to a woman.

Accordingly one finds the *purdah* system and child-marriage entrenched in Hindu homes everywhere in Northern India where the Moghul dynasties held greatest sway, and in South India also certain aspects of it have

become so common that it would be difficult to remove them quickly. The wife may not talk to any other man than her husband, even his brothers being forbidden friendship with her. Ladies do not go to public meetings; they may never go about unaccompanied, and usually the four walls of their houses and courtyards are their boundaries, save for visits to the temple to which they go together in bands.

Here at once it must be stated that while the *gosha* system prevails amongst all the castes in Northern India, and women are only rarely seen in the streets or anywhere in public, and then only closely veiled; in the South of India there is no such *purdah* system. Though the higher caste women in southern India lead a more secluded life than western women, the coolie women, the peasant women, the lower caste townswomen walk and work freely and openly, and in most respects have a healthier and happier life than their sisters of the same standing in the West.

It was during that warlike time, which may well be called the "Dark Ages" of Indian

womanhood, that bit by bit all her former freedom of action, her fine physique, her liberal education, her influence over public matters were taken away from the Indian woman, nothing being left her except indirect home influence.

At the present day, after over a century of British rule, the status of women varies very greatly according to geographical position, but there is everywhere a groping towards freedom and better education. It must always be remembered that India is a country as large as Europe minus Russia, and that it is peopled by as many and as varied races as is Europe. For instance, the Malabar people live under the matriarchal system in which all property descends through, and is held only by, the women; there women choose their own husbands, and child-marriage is unknown, with the result that they are a fine, virile race, and the degree of literacy among women is the highest in India. On the contrary, in the Province of Behar and Orissa, and also in the Panjab, only four women out of every thousand are literate. But whatever be the local variations, the state

of education in India is a disgrace to its connection with Britain, and in respect of female education it is in an appallingly low condition. The last statistics show that out of the total population of India only 106 men per thousand can read or write in their vernacular, and only 10 women in every 1,000!!

If it were not for the great body of traditional national culture imbedded in the religious functions and oral knowledge of this ancient people handed on from its "golden age," one would be inclined to think that Indians must be a rude, boorish people, seeing that their average of education is so deplorably low; but, as a matter of fact, despite their ignorance of book-learning and the three R's, the majority of Indian women have an inbred sense of grace, courtesy, good manners, tact, and knowledge of religious arts and literature, far in advance of the Board School girl, or even in many cases the College-trained girl of the West. With this basis Indian girls pick up very rapidly the education imparted in the few-and-far-between schools.

Until primary education is made free and compulsory for girls, with school hours better adjusted to the special domestic claims on

young Indian girls owing to the absence of servants, the status of women cannot be much improved. At present there is only one school in every six villages, and only boys attend most of such schools. Money must be lavishly allocated by Government or by private philanthropy for building schools, for paying staffs and upkeep, and for supporting numbers of training schools and hostels for teachers. Indian women, especially widows, should be induced to come to these by means of free scholarships for education and boarding. The most crying need of the moment is a supply of women teachers, either eastern or western. Unless elementary education is quickly and broadly extended to girls throughout all India, there can be no satisfactory improvement in the status of Indian women, nor will they be in a position, or even have the wish, to call later for certain reforms in the customs of the country. Facilities for college education are relatively far in excess of those for primary schooling, and this is only the creation of an apex without a breadth of base.

The greatest barrier to education, however, in the higher castes comes from the custom

of marrying the girls at about the age of ten, and then jealously guarding them within the four walls of their home so that no breath of scandal may tarnish their fair names before they go to their husband's homes at about the age of fourteen, then to undertake immediately the responsibilities of motherhood. I have spoken of this crucial matter in a previous chapter, but must repeat it because of its vital importance. Through this custom the education of girls is ended just at the time they are becoming properly interested in it, and many are the tears shed when the fiat goes forth, "You must not go again to the school." In no part of the world so much as in India would Aristotle have been justified in calling women "arrested developments".

This habit of early seclusion affects also the physical status of Indian womanhood very detrimentally, for it entails lack of exercise just at a time when open-air games would be most useful in building up the physique for the strain that will so shortly be placed on it. The heavy rate of mortality amongst these young wives is one of the strongest witnesses to the need for raising the age at which a girl

begins the family life, and for giving her full opportunities for education and physical development. The low state of health and vitality prevalent amongst the women of the present day is a menace also to the future generation who cannot escape being weaklings.

By narrowly limiting the circle of women whom the young girl meets (she is allowed to be friendly with no males except her brothers), the advantages of broad human intercourse are denied to the growing mind, and in the case of the older ladies, especially in *purdah* parts of India, the women are practically cut off from all knowledge of the world. They do not know even the streets of their own town in most instances. The restrictions of caste and sub-caste add a further limitation to the possibilities of that normal human intercourse which prevails in the lives of women in other lands. Even where *purdah* does not hold, there is no free companionship of men and women. For instance, the men are all served with their meals in advance of the women, and afterwards the latter eat theirs by themselves, very often in the kitchen. It is considered the proper thing

for the wife to stand when in her husband's presence; if a strange man comes to her house and enquires for her husband, she may not answer him, but will take it as an insult that he should address her at all.

The woman exists only for the husband and the children, but has no individual recognition. This is one reason why a widow becomes such a waste product in Indian social life. A woman has no thought of, or right to, a life of her own; she stands or falls entirely by her relationship to manhood, either to husband or son. A girl who is not married before puberty is a cause for excommunication; and if she marries after that age her children will be considered illegitimate. It is very regrettable that the Bill to legalise post-puberty marriage, introduced in the Legislature, has so far failed to pass into law, as it would make reforms much easier of attempt by progressive parents.

No review of women's position could exclude the servant question. It cuts very deeply into the Indian woman's life. Members of a different caste or even sub-caste may not touch the food or bedding or persons or the wells of members of a higher caste without polluting

them. Accordingly, a Brahman household must have a Brahman servant as cook, nurse, etc., and these high-caste servants are scarce and expensive, so the chief work of the household is usually done by the women. Besides, the preparation of food is looked on as a religious duty and privilege, and the care of the baby and its breast-nursing are absolutely incumbent on the mother for over its first two years. These things turn the women of the household often into drudges, overworked cooks, and mere sex-machines through lack of balance from any intellectual or truly spiritual part of their nature. There is the other extreme of very wealthy families where the wife becomes little more than a doll. It is not impossible, but it is not so usual as one would like, to find the happy medium amongst women whose husbands are in moderate or poor positions.

Theoretically, no country, no religion, holds womanhood in such high honour as Hindu India does. No other religion of the present time worships Goddesses; no other looks on the Mother as Divine. Practically, woman stands in a contradictory or ambiguous position. As

wife she is virtually the servant of her husband—her primary virtue must be obedience, and she must ask her husband's leave before undertaking anything unusual. Yet as mother she is the virtual ruler of their children. Her slightest wishes are obeyed to an extraordinary extent by even her middle-aged sons. It is in this relationship that the immense power of the women of India lies, and when Indian mothers are as well educated as Indian fathers they will have much more direct influence on public and private life than the western mother has.

It can be definitely stated that throughout India the status of woman in her capacity as mother is much higher than that of any western mother; and it is along the line of the responsibility thus thrown on her, to know how to lead her children wisely and patriotically, that the public spirit of Indian womanhood may best be developed.

On the other hand, in no other country is the status of the widow so low and lamentable as in India. A child may be married at five years and a few days afterwards her husband may die, but yet she becomes a life-long widow, though the second marriage ceremony,

entitled the consummation of marriage, does not take place till a girl is about fourteen. For all her future life the widow is practically an outcaste from social life. She may not marry again, nor take a share in any marriage festivities, nor may she wear flowers, jewels, or pretty saris. It used to be the custom that she must shave off all her hair, but this refinement of cruelty is fast disappearing. She usually becomes "the poor relation" who does all the hard and rough work of the family, and whom circumstances force into being the most religious and orthodox member of the household. Her lot often becomes so unbearable that cases of widow-suicide are quite common. There are at least 17,000 of these baby widows under five years of age, and 350,000 under 15 years old. Recently it has been made *legal* for a widow to re-marry, but the Hindu religion does not at present approve of the innovation, and excommunication of the parties and families is the result of such a step.

If the widows could but be trained in large numbers as teachers, doctors, nurses, the gain to Indian life would be immense; but the

selfishness of the family elders, and the difficulties of obtaining suitable caste lodgings in strange places, combined with the objection felt to any woman of a high caste earning money for herself (it being a reflection on the power and willingness of the male members of the joint family to support her) and lastly, her own diffidence derived from her sense of being under a curse of Karma, all make it extremely difficult to remove her to the influence of a good educational training for the service of her sisters and country.

Despite the disadvantages in status enumerated, there is no doubt that the Indian woman of the higher castes is shielded splendidly from the uncertainties, difficulties, and temptations of the rough-and-tumble life of the wage-earning western woman. As there is no excess of women over men in India, there is the shelter of her husband's home available for each woman, who is thus never forced into earning her living. Within the narrow confines of this home she has a peaceful, irresponsible, untroubled life, full of quiet little religious festivals, many charities and hospitalities, and surrounded by the love and devotion of her

children. She is often steeped in religious literature, and she cultivates music and the various home handicrafts. Thus, with practically every woman provided with a home, it is extremely unlikely that there will at any time be an incursion of women into the arena of labour similar to that in the West. In the Shudra caste, however, women work very freely side by side with men in all kinds of labour denied to their sisters in other countries; but sex, and not the quality of the work done, rules the rate of payment in India as elsewhere. Generally speaking, the status of the Indian woman of to-day is very similar to that of the women of early Victorian times in England. She has better rights of property, however, more respect from her religion for her sex, a greater reverence shown her for her motherhood, and no man-made legal barriers to her public activities under Hindu law, whose principle seems to have been—" She *may* do what she *can* do ".

The future prospect of Indian womanhood is distinctly hopeful. Public opinion is fast waking up to the wrong done to the women

and the impoverishment caused to the public life by the lack of education they have had; and the call of freedom is making itself heard in the hearts of all the younger women.

In all matters regarding women the Bombay Presidency, comprising 19 million of people, is far ahead of any other part of British India. Its girls are well educated, marry as late as possible, and do not become mothers before 17. Its women were granted the Municipal vote some years ago and make good use of their right. Next to Bombay comes the Madras Presidency with its population of 40 millions. It has practically no *purdah* disability, but it has a dowry system in its higher castes which is unworthy of any progressive country. Match-making has become a sordid matter of business without romance or ideal in it. The parents of the girl have to pay exorbitant sums to induce the bridegroom's family to consent to the marriage. This makes a family of girls almost a curse to their parents.

In these Presidencies women are being encouraged to attend public lectures and meetings of all kinds, to read vernacular

newspapers, learn English, and take an interest in current politics.

In North India splendid work is being done for the advancement of women by the Arya Samaj and the Brahmo Samaj. These organisations have thrown aside the caste system and its restrictions, and they strive to remove the existing sex-disabilities. The women members of the Brahmo Samaj are noted for their devotion to teaching and their love of learning.

The conditions and status of the women in the Indian States of Baroda, Travancore, Cochin, and Mysore are far in advance of those in British India. The Parsi and Christian women also in India have achieved great freedom for themselves; indeed the latter form the great source of women teachers.

In many districts women's associations have been formed in which "household females," chiefly of the middle generation, meet regularly to discuss problems of the day, to continue their studies, to learn crafts for making their "house beautiful". The most successful of these are the Seva Sadan in Bombay and Poona, the Stree Bharata Mandal

of Calcutta and North India, and the Women's Indian Association, which has 50 Branches with its Headquarters at Adyar, Madras. There is a purely independent Indian Women's University, run more on Japanese than on British models, where the vernaculars are the medium of instruction, and English is made a secondary foreign language, unlike the Government institutions. A great sign of the times is that parents are beginning to look for education as a desirable equipment in the prospective wives of their sons. Increasingly important Ladies' Conferences are being held annually simultaneously with the National Congresses.

The Social Reform Conference as early as 1917 passed the following resolution, which is a regular Woman's Charter of Freedom of Opportunity not yet accorded to her by western countries:

"That sex shall form no disqualification to women entering any position or profession for which she shows herself capable."

The modern public spirit in women first showed itself clearly when a number of the best-known Indian women were so deeply

moved by the wrongs inflicted on their sisters in the Fiji Islands that they went in deputation to the Viceroy about the matter and succeeded in gaining the most urgent reforms. In 1916 the women of the country were stirred with indignation at the internment of Mrs. Besant, and held many women's protest meetings, and walked in procession to the temples to pray for her release. The most important event till then in the history of Indian women under British rule was the representative All-India Women's Deputation which waited upon the Secretary of State for India in 1917, and for the first time made a clear demand for Woman Suffrage and pressed for numerous educational facilities. Since that time there has been practical unanimity between all sections of opinion in Indian political life that women should be given their responsible share in self-government; that, as the National Congresses have expressed it, "Women possessing the same qualifications as are laid down in any part of the (Reform) Scheme shall not be disqualified on account of sex."

The idea of an independent life, apart from the life of marriage, is foreign to the thought

of the ordinary Indian woman, and is likely to remain so. Yet it is possible to feel the stir of a new life, new attitudes to problems, new desires for wider service to the Motherland moving within her quiet sphere. The transition period between the types of women will be a difficult one for each individual. Already it is being felt so, but such is the price of growth in freedom. Men are anxious that the women of the land shall keep pace with them, and they welcome women to all their representative gatherings.

One of the most notable women in India to-day is Mrs. Sarojini Naidu—poetess-politician-peacemaker. She has written poems which move all India by their beauty and patriotism; she has been a leading figure in all political and social reform movements, and she has been elected President of several Provincial Conferences: she has been one of the greatest influences making for the Hindu-Muhammadan entente; she is the living continuation of the famous women of India's past, one of the very brightest jewels in its crown of starry figures. Mrs. Gandhi has suffered martyrdom in an African prison in her fight for the freedom of

her country-folk in that country; Mrs. Ramabai Ranade is the life and soul of the Seva Sadan movement, and proves what powers of organisation women have; Bibi Amman, the lion-hearted mother of the imprisoned Muslim political leaders, received a striking tribute of respect and admiration from the assembled National Congress on her veiled entrance to its platform; and Miss Cornelia Sorabji and Mrs. Ghosal are much-loved story-tellers of the land.

These and many others are the first fruits of this new age of Indian womanhood in which will be regained all those powers and honours of partnership with men which belonged to the women of the past; which are still sanctioned by the older Hindu scriptures and Hindu religious law; which are as yet untampered with by British law; and which are only suffering a temporary eclipse.

The awakening ideal has been expressed by the world-renowned Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore, in his play "Chitra," in which the heroine says to her husband, as her final revelation of womanhood to manhood:

"I am Chitra. No goddess to be worshipped, nor yet the object of common pity to be

brushed aside like a moth with indifference. If you deign to keep me by your side in the path of danger and daring, if you allow me to share the great duties of your life, then you will know my true self."

CHAPTER VIII

SHRIMATI RAMABAI RANADE

THE late Justice Ranade has many claims on the gratitude of Indians for the great work he initiated and accomplished, but the more I see and know of the life of Bombay and Poona, the more do I think that Mr. Ranade's greatest achievement was his wife. Under her care the great institution known as the Seva Sadan has developed from being a Hindu Ladies' Social Club with about twenty members in 1909, into the finest educational institution for married women in India with a daily attendance of over 900 married women in 1922.

What manner of woman is this who has been able so to stimulate in other women such a widespread desire for knowledge and so to organise successful methods of satisfying it? She is a typical daughter of her land—Maharashtra—simple, hard-working, hard-headed,

soft-hearted, practical, idealistic, patriotic, parochial, shy, brave, conservative, pioneering; a paradox of good qualities, but supremely a servant of her sisters, with life dedicated to their advancement.

"Readiness" seems to me to be her fundamental characteristic. It is illustrated by her method of replying to my request that she would spare me some of her valuable time at the close of a meeting which we were both attending, and then grant me an interview. "Come into my office now;" she said, "we can have some time while the ladies are gathering, and I will tell you about my life." So has she been ready and willing to seize every opportunity for helpfulness.

But while her spirit of readiness belongs to her own soul, her capacity for being prepared for the best use of the opportunity is the product of years of training and education given to her by her noble husband. She told me she was born in a little village in the Satara District. That was in 1862, and she was only eleven years old when she was married to the then recently widowed Mr. Ranade, aged thirtytwo. It was a great

blow to his idealism that his father insisted that he should marry a mere child, but he was the eldest of a large family and his sense of filial duty was strong. He determined that at least he would put the remains of his idealism into practice in his care and protection of his little Ramabai, and from the moment she came to his house he began to teach her all he knew. It was against odds that together he carried out her education. It was a large household of 25 people of the old-fashioned, orthodox kind. "Not even the children were allowed to go out freely," said Mrs. Ranade, "and when they saw me reading a book, they looked on it as an insult to them, and used to tell me to put it away. It was only in my husband's room that I had peace, learning and freedom."

When Ramabai Ranade was 19 years of age she came under the influence of the Pandita Ramabai who started the Mahila Arya Samaj and at her house used to conduct Purans week by week. Because Mrs. Ranade attended these meetings, she was not allowed to touch the other women of the family or the cooking vessels of the house. But she persisted in

improving her mind, and gained so much courage from the example of the Pandita that in 1884 she read an address to the Governor praying that a Girls' High School might be established in Poona. In those days it took immense courage for a woman to stand up in public at all, even to read an address composed by her husband. In these days it is not public opinion a woman speaker fears, but her own nervousness. Mrs. Ranade is now a ready, forceful speaker, able to set forth clearly and convincingly the points she wishes to make.

Justice Ranade liked to have the newspapers read aloud to him. Sometimes he would ask his wife to read, or she would be present while his clerk read them. They would then discuss public questions together, and this proved the foundation of Ramabai Ranade's interest in affairs of the day. She used to travel with her husband on his official tours, and both then and during his vacations she came into touch with the wives of other Indian officials to whom she used to speak of what she had learnt through the papers and through her precious conversations with her husband. This led to the establishment of

drawing-room meetings in her house. In these private ways she was being trained for the great work which has now become hers.

Alas, in 1901, after only five months' illness, the beloved husband was unexpectedly snatched away by Yama, and the 27 years' comradeship was closed. For a year the afflicted widow remained in the strictest seclusion, but her greatest ambition was to live as her husband had encouraged her to do —for the service of others. They had had no children, but had adopted a daughter, and with her Mrs. Ranade removed to a house which was her own property in Poona, and there she tried to soften her sorrow in work that she knew would please her husband and be useful to others.

She started a Hindu Ladies' Social Club which met at her house and which later opened classes for illiterate women and widows. There was thus an organised body of women ready to whom the members of the Servants of India Society could turn for help in urgent social work when plague and famine ravaged the city and the surrounding districts.

Through the co-operation of Mr. G. K. Devadhar, one of the prominent members of that Society, the whole scheme of the present Seva Sadan was drawn up, and the older Ladies' Club was expanded into it with results then undreamt of. Its objects may be summed up as education, mutual helpfulness, national service. Its means are organisation and self-sacrifice. The meaning of Seva Sadan is the Home of Service.

As Mrs. Ranade is the life and soul of the movement, it was but natural that it was round her home that the classes first started. There in a quiet street off the main thoroughfares of Poona City, she and Mr. Devadhar, her right-hand-man, have grappled with problem after problem of finance, staff, housing, expansion, as they came up for solution. Oh, the pride that shone in her eyes and thrilled in her voice as she told me the fact that she had just found from the attendance roll that 900 women were attending daily excluding those coming to the maternity and infant welfare centre! One is tempted to relate the romance of that story of expansion, but it is the *woman* we are here concerned with. It is characteristic of the

whole matter that Mrs. Ranade herself would much rather I wrote of that story than of her! She hates to have to come before the public. She inspires from within. And yet she does not shrink from leadership. She is well aware of her own valuable amount of experience, and has no false modesty about gripping some new big work which has to be done. She was the leader of an agitation in Poona for Compulsory Primary Education for Girls that was an object-lesson to the public of women's earnestness and splendid power of public organisation, and yet she would not walk in their procession or sit in the group photograph! She is equally keen now on woman suffrage, and yet the thought of interviewing a Councillor whom she has not before met through private friends, causes her the utmost shrinking. One feels in her presence the psychology of the transition period of Indian womanhood from the cloistered, intensive idealism of the past to the expansive public mothering spirit of the future.

It touched me deeply to learn that every Sunday she goes to the prison in Poona and speaks kind words of spiritual comfort to her

sisters there, those often more sinned against (by society) than sinning. Thus even her Sundays she devotes to freeing souls in bondage.

Though plain of face, figure and dress, at first glance hardly distinguishable from hundreds of other dull-sareed Marathi women, yet there is a sense of alertness, awareness, aliveness about her that marks her out from her sisters, and shines from her clear, free eyes despite the spectacles which tell of limitations of sight. Similarly, though she is small of physical stature, she is head and shoulders over all of us in her spirit of self-renunciation and in the success of her persevering work.

I asked her, "What do you think of the future of women in India?" "It is full of hope and promise," she replied, and in doing so spontaneously took my hand and pressed it. It touches a Westerner when her Eastern sister does that. It bridges gulfs and knits the human sisterhood together. Like Mirabai of the poet's intuition she

> Wears little hands
> Such as God makes to hold big destinies.

Her hands revealed her soul, for in their touch was soft sweetness and strong vitality

which still inspire me, and which promise the blessing of her remarkable powers of service to humanity for years to come.

Since writing the above Mrs. Ranade has become the proud possessor of the legislative vote, woman suffrage having been granted in the Bombay Presidency. The greatest applause of the three days' debate on the subject in the Bombay Council was given at the mention of her name by the Hon. H. Lawrence, Member of the Executive Council. Having first fully supported the grant of the vote to women, he went on to say that even their admission into the Council itself as Members had no terrors for him, for, said he, " There is no Council which would not be honoured, graced and helped by the presence of such a woman as one who is known to us all, Mrs. Ramabai Ranade".

CHAPTER IX

SHRIMATI SAROJINI NAIDU

MY acquaintance with Shrimati Sarojini Naidu most fortunately began at the centre of her life, her home, and afterwards in sequence I grew to know her in her ever-widening circles of influence, power and service, as Poetess, Peacemaker, Politician, Priestess of India's freedom in foreign lands.

A daintily expressed invitation had come to me from her in June, 1916, requesting me to break a journey between Poona and Madras by a call at Hyderabad, where at her home we might talk over many things we had in common. I well remember the delightful sense of coolness and culture that greeted my jaded senses as I entered her beautiful drawing-room, where the perfection of artistic taste had known how to combine the rich effects of Eastern colour in carpets and crafts with the comfort of Western

lounges and modern conveniences. And here and there were tall vases or wide bowls full of the most beautiful white lotuses I had ever seen. Alas! the queen of the home was still so weak after a recent attack of illness that it was to her bedroom I was brought to greet her, and found (what all know) that her work in the world has been done in spite of physical handicaps which would drive anyone less high-spirited and less optimistic than herself into despair.

Next morning, as I sat on the side of her low bed, she read me from the manuscript many of the poems that she had just then completed and which were later published as 'The Broken Wing'. Others she recited with a depth of emotional intensity that swept me off my feet. I remember especially the love and reverence which she poured into her poems to her Father and her national Guru, Gokhale. But it was afterwards, as we talked over the problems connected with the harmonious relationships of races within and without India, as I perceived the 'long views' she took of the influence of Indian thought on the life of the future, as I felt her sympathetic

understanding of the struggle of women then proceeding for political and economic freedom in other countries and heard her wise attitude to feminist problems of the East, that I cried out within myself: "She is greater than they told me. She is greater than her poems. Her patriotism is the rival even while it is the inspiration of her poetry. For her country she would sacrifice even her beloved gift of song." She was not then the power in political affairs that she has since proved herself, but my feelings then about her have proved themselves true prophets. I was much impressed with the 'bigness' of her mind and the dainty grace of her small person, fragile after her long wrestle with pain.

It was touching to see how she was the cherished one in the household. There was the protecting strength and upholding of her clever, quiet husband with his sense of power, the admiration and petting given her by her children, the devotion and consideration shown her by her servants, all bearing eloquent tribute to her ideal character as wife, mother and employer. In personality she ever kept reminding me of France. I felt I should be

speaking French and not English to her. The silver ornaments on her dressing-table of the French Empire design, the gestures she so often uses, slight mannerisms akin to pose, the foreign nuance in her accent, and her wit and vivacity, caused one to speculate romantically about her last incarnation and dream of her as the bright and shining star of some brilliant French salon at the height of France's glory. Or, rather, she is the Aryan type from which we can see how easily sprang the whole Celtic race. In appearance, save for her dress, she might easily be taken for an Italian, such is the similarity between the root-stock and its children of Europe.

I have called her a Peace-maker, and it is one of the names she best loves. It is one of her dearest desires to link with the bonds of love and mutual interests and understanding the great Muslim and Hindu sections of Indian life, and from that unity to stretch out hands of fellowship to the Western races. The circumstances of her life have caused her to be a living epitome of what she seeks. Hindu by birth, brought up in constant touch with Muhammadans in a Muhammadan city, and

again in later life making her home and friends in the same city, receiving her impetus to poetic expression from her contact with the culture and civilisation of Europe, and receiving also there her first recognition as a genius, she is the product of all the diversities she now seeks to unify. Thus she is equally at home in a Muslim gathering and in an English lecture hall. The contribution she, unaided, made towards bringing about the Hindu-Muslim entente cannot be measured.

It was later that she responded to the call to stand forward as the spokeswoman of her own sex in the Deputations first to the Viceroy, on behalf of the Indian women in Fiji, and next as the leader of the All-India Women's Deputation to the Honourable E. S. Montagu, Secretary of State for India, during his historic visit to India. It was then that she fully identified herself with the claim for the political Franchise for Indian women, a movement which she made particularly her own during the following years. I remember she told us she had chosen her saree with care that day so that its effect might be like the gleaming of the silver moonlight in the

dark blue vault of the heavens,—the woman, the poetess and the stage-manager aiding and abetting the demand for justice and equality! And yet there are people who believe that an interest in politics will make woman less feminine!

Nowhere in public life has Sarojini Devi shown her all-round abilities so conspicuously as when she fulfilled the office of President of the Madras Provincial Conference. It was the first time an Indian Lady had been given such an honour, and it turned out such a turning-point in South Indian politics that she was confronted with a task of supreme difficulty. During those days at Conjiveram she held the balance straightly and sweetly by the high level of idealism, rather than of detail, to which she lifted herself and her office in that assembly. I thought her like a highly-wrought, bejewelled clasp of finest gold which held together the divided edges of Mother India's cloak of patriotism. In politics she essays to carry out Ruskin's idea of woman being the inspirer and guide rather than the dominator or leader. In this rôle she has been a most helpful member of the Subjects

Committee of the National Congresses. Her experience and training in public administrative work of a national kind make it essential that all the new Reform Legislatures, even the most exalted, be freely open to women such as she, so that their services may be availed of in consolidating and expanding the instalment of national freedom given by the Reform Bill for which she worked so strenuously.

Part of her popularity as a publicist is due to her gift of eloquence. She is one of the most sought-after speakers in India. Old and young flock to hear her. Her enunciation is clear, her voice carries a surprisingly long distance, her subjects are always interesting and topical, her style is rhetorical and impassioned, depending on making its effects more by appeals to the emotions and intuition than to the reason. She also possesses that personal magnetism and charm of manner which are so essential for a fine lecturer. Her English is perfect, but I have always wished to hear her speak in one of the Indian mother-tongues. I imagine she would be entirely irresistible in them. As might be expected, imagery and figures of speech of all kinds abound in her

addresses and there is a natural tendency towards rhythm in all her prose which adds to its appeal to the listener.

She who passed her Matriculation at the age of 12 has long been the idol of students all over India. I once saw her being met by crowds of them at a railway station where the wealth of flowers heaped upon her might have seemed an answer to her own cry :

> Hide me in a shrine of roses,
> Drown me in a wine of roses
> Drawn from every fragrant grove !

And with her, as with Browning's "Patriot," it has indeed been "Roses, roses, all the way" save where the thorns of physical pain have caused her to cry out :

> Pain-weary and dream-worn I lie awake,
> Counting like beads the blazing stars o'erhead.

From all this admiration and acclamation she turned at the call of patriotic duty, and like a true political sannyasin went out into the wilderness of the West to add her persuasive voice to those other servants of India who went in Deputation to the British Parliament in connection with the formulation

of the promised Reform Bill. Her Memorandum to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the desirability and justice of granting full franchise and political equality to Indian Women was a remarkable combination of the prose of fact with the poetry of idealism. It won high encomiums from all, and will remain a classic of feminism in this country. After that she has spent her time in visiting various European countries, always in the interest of India. She had a royal reception in a tour she was requested to take in Sweden. At the Conference of the International Women Suffrage Alliance held in Geneva, Switzerland, her addresses made a profound impression and revolutionised the false ideas of many concerning the conditions and capacity of Indian women. In Paris she received a great ovation, and her lectures in all the important cities of Great Britain drew very large and appreciative audiences who were entirely charmed by her eloquence. She brought to the West the message of India's spiritual culture, of its ideals of Ahimsa, tolerance, passive resistance, soul-force, and the worship of the Mother. She is a Priestess of a new Gospel,

a propagandist of the dignity, capability, poetry, purity and practicality of Indian womanhood and therefore of the whole Indian nation, for 'a nation rises only to the level of its women.'

Sarojini is a unique link between the great heroines of the past and the free and clever and wise womanhood of the future Bharatavarsha. She proves to us that the tales of the virtues of Savitri, Damayanti, Padmini, and Mirabai are no exaggerations, for she also has shown self-determination, self-reliance, self-sacrifice, self-expression equal to theirs but in a modern setting. She is also the forerunner of many of India's daughters whose talents languish and die for lack of many of the advantages of unfettered education and travel such as her good father delighted to pour out on her. Under present customs, which arrest the development of so many Indian girls,

> Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
> And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

But Mrs. Naidu's life, her genius, her freedom of thought and action, are an incentive and an inspiration to all young Indian womanhood, and an encouragement to all of her own generation who are seeking to procure

generally for future India the advantages of circumstances which were exceptionally hers, and which undoubtedly helped to make her

> Native of a coming day
> Far upon our human way,
> When in eyes of all shall shine
> What is prophecy in thine.

CHAPTER X

SHRIMATI ABALA BOSE

(LADY J. C. BOSE)

It is strange that the wives of great men do not get their adequate share of public attention, for it takes a great woman to be the worthy helpmeet of a genius, be he a scientist, artist, poet or statesman. The Indian Rishis recognised this fact when they decreed that the wife of the Guru was to be given as great reverence as the Guru himself. The world of science and the Indian people who recognise Sir J. C. Bose as a modern Guru have not recognised how much indebted they are to his wife both as an ideal wife for such a man and as an outstanding personality in her own right. She is one of the most awakened women in India today and one of the most potent forces in social reform in Bengal.

By heredity, temperament and education Lady Bose is admirably fitted for the great task she is destined to fulfil. Her father, the late Durga Mohan Das, was an ardent member of the Brahmo Samaj, a leading lawyer in Calcutta, and a champion of education for girls. He was one of the founders of a Girls' School which became so highly efficient that it was desired that it should be joined with the well-known Bethune School, and raised to the status of a College for women. Lady Bose retains an intense affection and admiration for her father, who was such a wonderful man that he seemed like father and mother in one (her mother had died early.) Along the road of science he destined his Abala to travel, and she spent four years attending the Medical College in Madras, but became such a victim to fever for the last year in the trying climate of that city that much to her disappointment she had to give up her studies and return home. But her training in science gave her the basis for intellectual companionship and affinity of interest with the young scientist whom she just about then met soon after his return from England. Jagadish C. Bose is six years her

senior, and their marriage was a demonstration of many points of social reform. Lady Bose was then twenty-two years old, and the Professor twenty-eight; she belonged to a wealthy household and was accustomed to luxury, while he was burdened with the debts of his family. It shows the character of the woman that she was proud to share these burdens and renounced many of her comforts to be his helpmeet and companion. In many ways those first years were trying. To avoid high rents they lived a long way from the University where Bose was teaching; this meant that his wife had many tedious hours of loneliness. But the holidays made up for much, for they used to go off on long tours to Taxilla and Nalanda, Kashmir and Ajanta, close to Nature and in intimate touch with the past history of the country. Now Lady Bose lets nothing prevent her from cajoling or dragging out her husband for his evening drive, and in Darjeeling they still do a large amount of walking and hill-climbing. She is his Sancho Panza, taking the greatest care of his food, regulating the household (twice a day are the marble floors washed) and keeping the household belongings in

perfect order. It is a characteristic of this scientist that he is always spotlessly dressed. He says he is too absent-minded to be a safe driver of his car, but he has none of the personal untidiness that one sometimes associates with researchers into the unknown: but then, perhaps his wife is eyes and ears and hands to him on the lower levels of daily life: it struck me, at any rate, that she is. Indeed she admitted as much when she said that he could never have managed for himself on his long tours.

She has accompanied him in all his world-tours, although at first she was herself very much averse to travelling. Now she enjoys it thoroughly, and she told me that nothing broadens one's outlook so much as meeting representative men and women of different nationalities and yet finding humanity much the same despite its surface differences. She is probably the most travelled Indian woman of today. She has met the most famous scientists and literary men of nearly every country and has formed warm friendships with a number of families both in Europe and America.

My first impression of Lady Bose was, "Here is a free woman full of motherliness and common-sense". I found later that, though she has no children of her own, she mothers eight nephews and nieces who think the world of her; she mothers the students of the Research Institute; and as the enthusiastic and hard-working Secretary of the Brahmo Girls' School and the six schools of the "Nari Siksha Samiti" she mothers over 500 girls and a large number of young wives and mothers to whose education she devotes her fine organising ability.

Her dedication to the promotion of education dates from the days of her girlhood when the intense wave of national feeling swept through Bengal, and no more fervid patriots could be found than Abala and her two young friends. The three of them had, one day, when girls, locked themselves into their room and solemnly vowed to one another that they would do exercises daily to make their bodies strong, and devote their lives to the service of their country. For years she opposed the idea of accepting any Government aid for girls' schools under her care, but a

growing realisation that it was the money of their own people, to be used for the service of the people, reconciled her to taking grants for the splendid school for which she and her sisters and brother contributed Rs. 40,000. How I wished, as she told me of those unique vows, that thousands of girls throughout India might be similarly fired with dedication to health, self-reliance, and educational service of others!

Her keen patriotism shows itself in the practical details of her home life. During my enjoyment of her delightful hospitality I noticed the absence of foreign-made articles in her home. Everywhere were brass and stone vessels, homespun cloths, Dacca saries, Indian printed cottons as curtains and covers, meals taken in the orthodox Indian fashion (delicious food it was, and I felt honoured in partaking of it in the Indian manner,) Indian furniture and pictures by Indian artists. Only in scientific appliances is the West allowed to enter, and hygienic, sanitary, and labour-saving arrangements are made full use of in this wise lady's home. It would be a happier, healthier and wealthier day for India if all her housewives thus combined the best of East and West in

their house-keeping. Lady Bose considers her friendship with Sister Nivedita, who spent many a day in their home, as one of the most precious things in her interesting and romantic life.

During the debate on the subject of Woman Suffrage in the Bengal Legislative Council in 1921 Lady Bose was to be seen each day in the Ladies' Gallery, for she is a strong supporter of the movement for the removal of sex disqualification in political affairs. Indeed she was one of the signatories to the request for the rights of citizenship made first at the historic All-India Women's Deputation to the Hon. E. S. Montagu, then Secretary of State for India. Her nephew, Mr. S. M. Bose, brought forward the suffrage Resolution in the Bengal Council, and it was a great disappointment to her that it was defeated. She is a member of the Committee of the Bangiya Naree Samaj, affiliated with the Women's Indian Association as the Calcutta Branch of the latter, and she forms an influential centre of the suffrage movement in Bengal.

Added to her many activities Lady Bose has recently drafted a scheme on a large scale for

a Training Home and Hostel for Widows and Indigent Women to be established in Calcutta. It bids fair to become the blessing to Eastern India which Mrs. Ranade's similar institution has been to the Bombay side. She has had the great encouragement of receiving a Donation for it of Rs. 10,000 from Shrimati Harimati Datta, another Bengali lady.

Devoted primarily to the care and companionship of her husband, Lady Bose has proved in her life that the awakened Indian wife of today can combine most able service to the education of her sex with private home cares, and that the internationalism of science can be linked on to the promotion of national well-being.

So far back as 1900, Swami Vivekananda, with his penetrating insight, could see all these powers in her. In one of his letters about the Paris International Congress of 1900 he writes :

"Here in Paris have assembled the great of every land, each to proclaim the glory of his country. Savants will be acclaimed here, and its reverberation will glorify their countries. Where is thy representative, O thou the country of my birth? Out of this vast

assembly a young man stood for thee, one of thy heroic sons, whose words have electrified the audience, and will thrill all his countrymen. Blessed be this heroic son; blessed be his devoted and peerless helpmeet who stands by him always."

Indeed, she might be termed our international object-lesson to the world of the ideal Indian wife, a veritable modern Maitreyi, wandering this forest of a world with her husband, giving and receiving knowledge of the Divine Unity in Manifestation.

CHAPTER XI

BURMESE MINIATURES

THEY came tripping along a busy street of Rangoon, attracting me by the smiling interchange of their merry conversation which seemed to be echoed by their fluttering pink silk scarves and their pattering sandals. This pair of Burmese girls seemed as careless and thoughtless as butterflies, when suddenly, on passing the steps leading up to the pagoda, they dropped on their knees on the crowded footpath, and there, beside the pagoda railing, interrupted their careless chattering by an act of sweet and simple prayer of devotion to the Buddha typical of their whole race. As devoid of self-consciousness or sex-consciousness as the flowers they carried were they as they rose and flitted onwards again.

* * *

She sat beside me on a cosy couch in a Burmese drawing-room. Her jet-black hair

was arranged high on the head in a stiff circlet like a crown from the side of which dropped bell-like small pink and white flowers placed there with inimitable grace, giving quaint piquancy to the rest of the dainty young figure. "Will you come with me to the horse races to-morrow?" she asked me in perfect English. "Oh, I had hoped you would have come to our ladies' meeting then," I replied. "My horses will be running. I must see them. I have twelve of them," she said. "And do you bet also?" I inquired. "No, but I take a great interest in the stakes, which are high here in Burma. What a pity you cannot join me." Thus I stumbled with surprise across the Burmese society women's share in the Burmese passion for racing and gambling.

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What a sweet smile she gave us as we approached her cloth-stall on a small platform outside a shop in the bazaar! "She pays only Rs. 8 per month for the use of this position," explained my Dutch friend. "She is a splendid saleswoman and always so sweet tempered." I bought a coatee from her of the kind the Burmese wear. "Swadeshi" she pointed out

with the newly born pride in home manufacture that is becoming as evident in Burma as in India. I also purchased the under-camisole of the costume. Though it was elaborately made with a design necessitating much care and stitching, its cost was only one rupee! There must be "sweating" somewhere, I fear, that needs investigation. Is the great industry of Burmese women being exploited? No Burmese men-shopkeepers are to be seen; all the retail commerce of the country is in the capable hands of the women. Arithmetic is the favourite subject of the Burmese school-girl. How different from India!

* * *

Rows of little girls, unlike any others I had ever seen, were being taught in much the same way as all other children of the world, but their teachers were essentially different because of their striking youthfulness. These have come forward voluntarily to staff the National Educational Schools which since two years ago have introduced into the curriculum the teaching of the Buddhist religion and the more extensive use of the Burmese

language. Zeal for service as educationists is noticeable among the young men and women of Burma to-day. A delightful lunch of Burmese delicacies served by these young ladies to the accompaniment of music on the Burmese harp rounded off my visit to these Girls' Schools. Young men and women teachers moved together easily; and these brightly-dressed graceful girls fluttered handkerchiefs from the windows as I drove away, and then shyly and quickly ran out of sight, leaving me with the impression that they had done something unusually demonstrative for their custom, the dears!

* * *

In the great Golden Pagoda (Shwe Dagon) a procession comes along slowly and with dignity. It is that of a Shan Chieftain who had come from North Burma to honour the Prince of Wales. Men and women move together, the Chieftain, his wife, sons and daughters, members of his retinue of both sexes. All are richly dressed in silks, the women's skirts heavily embroidered round the ends in silver and sequins; beautiful jewels are on their necks and hands (not on their faces),

yet gaudiness and ostentation are noticeably absent. The good taste of the Burmese in dress is unimpeachable. They carry flowers, candles, favours, trays of sweetmeats and fruit as offerings. The Chieftainess directs the placing of these on the shrines while the young daughters are frankly more interested in the people visiting the Pagoda, and we politely exchange stares until they proceed with their devotions.

* * *

Behold the shining Golden Pagoda on the left, carved brown wooden minarets on the right, gleaming white shrines and tall palm trees in the background and a host of grey-blue pigeons on the marble platform in the foreground. In the midst of these is a woman in a brown silk skirt, a white muslin short jacket, a brilliant yellow scarf which throws into relief the vivid black of her hair and the motions of her pretty hands as she scatters grain in the sunlight to these feathered friends of hers whose ranks are now increased by a number of crows and some cocks and hens. Thus is she practising "compassion to all creatures".

* * *

We are taking a walk in the Burmese town of Prome by the side of the Irrawaddy river. Pretty red flowers are in a pile under a tall tree, and others are being thrown down. Figures are seen high up among the branches. Are they children or monkeys? We peer up, —no, they are respectable, middle-class, middle-aged Burmese women! Unrestricted by convention, clothing, or incapacity, they have climbed up to get the beauty they want for the adornment of their hair. Free as the birds are the women of Burma!

* * *

The wooden houses of the Burmese countryside are all built on a platform raised above the ground on stakes. The lower storey is unwalled and left open, the upper storey is walled in by some woven bark material in pretty design and shades of brown. As the sunset fades, one sees the family groups on this upper storey verandah with heads just above its low railing, men and women and children all seated together, and all except the smallest children smoking large cheroots whose glowing ends form the only light in the

house for the following hour. Such is the quiet family eventide in the village.

* * *

At home, shopping, in the Pagoda, everywhere, she carries her large cheroot, lights it now and again, smokes it gracefully, allows it to go out but still carries it for further pleasure. It may be one of those so long and thick that it lasts for a whole day. Smoking is the most observable feature of the Burmese woman's life. Beside it the cigarette of the modern Western girl sinks into pale insignificance. But what about nicotine poisoning?

* * *

The tall, pretty, young Burmese woman is striving to lift up her heavy basket of provisions from the shore. A well-dressed Muhammadan of middle age is about to pass her and sees her efforts. He kindly and respectfully helps her to hoist it to her head. She smiles her thanks, and they proceed in opposite directions. No race antagonisms here.

* * *

Those deep wicker and lacquer trays carry food for sale, explains my friend. Very little

cooking is done in individual homes by Burmese townswomen, since they leave their houses early for their business; so meals are bought ready cooked daily. This is the Burmese solution of co-operative kitchens.

* * *

Who are these approaching in a line one behind the other? Each wears a fawn-yellow robe, each bears an earthen pot on her head. There is a sense of peace and aloofness about them. Only when they pass close by can one distinguish that they are women—Buddhist nuns. They live in their own community building near the beautiful pagoda crowning the hill which juts into the river, and they are wending their way down the steep bank to the riverside for the evening supply of water. Thousands of such dedicated women there are in Burma, vowed to the service of the Sanga (communal order) and to the quest for illumination. Did not the Buddha say in the *Chullavedalla Sutta*, "Woman may attain the highest path of holiness that is open to man—Arhatship".

* * *

A splash and a light laugh! I look towards the shore, and there is a young woman swimming out towards our steamer. With rapid strong strokes she leaves the shore, her black hair gleaming in the sunlight, then back again she moves till she reaches a naked small girlie. She catches her up and plays with her in the water while other bathing women and men lazily watch the pair. Having deposited the youngster on the bank, the young mother tightens her dark bathing-dress around her, and out she dives again in sheer joy of water, sunshine and motion! Free as the fishes are the women of Burma. Neither in the water, in the trees, on the open roads, nor in the market place does the Burmese woman know fear, or hold suspicion against man in her thought.

CHAPTER XII

CHARACTERISTICS OF ASIAN WOMANHOOD

THOUGH the Time-spirit is no respecter of geographical areas, and is permeating the Eastern hemisphere as much as the Western hemisphere with the necessity and the opportunity of full freedom for women; yet in nothing more than in the distinctive characteristics of eastern womanhood can it be seen that "East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet" in the sense of a complete uniformity of qualities.

Western civilisation is predominantly the outcome of a temperate climate, and its types of manhood and womanhood display qualities of body and mind which are the natural growth of the climate which nurtured them. A frosty day stimulates the body to enjoyable action. Outdoor sports lead to a spirit of adventure and

speculation, these again cultivate independence and self-reliance which produce a marked individualism with its tendency, at worst towards arrogance and aggression, and at best towards organisation and strict order.

On the other hand, most of the characteristics related to the Asian civilisation can be traced to the influence of the tropical climate on over six hundred millions of its population. Overpowering heat for six months in the year, glaring sunshine, burning sand to walk on, and an enervating atmosphere which weighs one down; all these prove the very reverse to bodily and mental stimulation. Those who can afford to do so stay indoors in darkened rooms, move about as little as possible, and cultivate passivity rather than activity. Recreation is got from playing cards, dice, or other sedentary games, through the cultivation of literature, music or painting, or through enjoyment of the drama in the cool hours of the night, a play usually beginning at 10 p.m. and ending about 2 a.m. Even those who are forced by economic necessity to work at manual and unskilled labour are prevented by conditions of heat and lassitude from doing

as much work per day as would be easily done by a similar worker in a temperate climate.

The consequence of this fundamental factor of climatic environment in the lives of Asian womanhood is, that, speaking generally, the physique of eastern women has remained undeveloped. The women are physically small, fragile, dainty, graceful, and fall an easy prey to fevers, plague, consumption, epidemics and the strain of childbirth. To the western mind the lack of interest shown by Asian women in games, outdoor sports, and physical culture is a striking characteristic of Asian civilisation. To the eastern mind western women look physically over-developed, hard, bold, big, and as if they had sacrificed beauty on the altar of robust good health. There are two points of view to everything! But the evidence of statistics leaves one in no doubt that the health of Asian women is deplorably poor, as seen by the very high percentage of women who die young, and by the low age at which the general death average stands compared with that of other countries. Exceptions to this state of affairs are to be found in women of the hill-tribes, and in women of the desert.

It is interesting to note in passing that all trades seem open to Asian women without any distinction of sex trades-unionism. Women take a full share in the building and road-making trades in India, for instance. One sees women mounting four flights of ricketty scaffolding steps carrying heavy loads of bricks or *chunam* (lime) on their heads, and seemingly having no nerves. Along the Chinese coasts the women sail the junks as skilfully as any men. In Burma the whole retail trade of the country is efficiently carried on by the women. In Bhopal State there is still a battalion of women warriors as bodyguard to the Begum. The women everywhere who have equality of fresh air, exercise, and mental opportunity with men, show the ability to develop equal physical powers; but these are usually the women of the poorer classes. Alas! the world-wide characteristic of payment for labour by sex, and not by similarity of work, holds good East as well as West; and in all except the teaching professions women are paid at a much lower rate than men. Sex as an economic factor is penalised everywhere

until women themselves organise for their own protection, or until men see that it does not serve their interests to have women underselling men's labour by doing equal work for less pay. The day of that consciousness has not yet risen in the East, in either men or women.

The thickly populated portions of Asia are primarily and predominantly agricultural, and women are as valuable workers on the land as are men, especially when a large amount of the work is done communally. This basis of essential co-operation between the sexes in all the processes of agriculture, in the production, preparation and consumption of food, in the growing of cotton and the processes of spinning and weaving it into clothing, forms the explanation of the satisfactory attitude of mutual respect and friendliness that is so noticeable a feature between the sexes in country areas, an attitude quite different from that of masculine industrial centres, or of the higher grades of society where women are too often treated as parasites only.

It is strange that in the West, where the lives of women are so free and open to view,

there is a great conspiracy of silence about all sex matters. It is strange that in the East, where all the particulars relating to sex are known to all, even to the young children, custom in all its countries enshrouds woman in mystery, and seeks to secure respect for her by shutting her away from view. This it does in one country by veiling her, in another by practically incarcerating her in harems, in another in zenanas, in a third by so manipulating the feet (in the name of beauty!) that they are made only the size and shape of a closed fist on which it is nearly impossible to balance oneself or walk (thus hobbled) without torture. The giving of respect to woman has come to be associated with customs and conventions of the social life rather than with the inherent character of the woman concerned.

The general artificially imposed aloofness from the masculine half of humanity, and indeed also from the women outside their own family circle, has developed in Asian women characteristics of shyness, modesty and timidity hard to find in women at present in other parts of the world. In the upper classes they

are retiring almost to the point of self-effacement. Downcast eyes in the presence of men is the order of the day from Japan to Suez. In many countries women cannot bear to appear before men or strangers (even women strangers) without the safe enfoldment of a veil. Behind its protection they will speak more at their ease. Will it be believed that a young Muhammadan lady who intends to make the law her profession, and who has already passed her first law examinations with distinction, has done all her study behind the curtains of strict *purdah*? And an Indian young lady who is brilliantly clever, and is becoming an eye specialist in the medical profession in London, clings to her veil and retains almost all her *gosha* customs in that city of women's freedom!

The timidity thus shown does not spring from fear or cowardice, for Asian history and story tell over and over again of the bravery of women—Jael, Padmini, the warrior queen of Jhansi, Sanghamita, Terutė, Abutsuni; it is the result of seclusion within narrow walls literally and metaphorically, in such darkness that the glare of the full light of day at first

half blinds and confuses them; and it is only when they have become accustomed to the new circumstances of free conversation with those outside their own immediate circle that they show their real character and ability. The shyness shown is also due to an excess of self-consciousness and exaggeration of sex-consciousness. Whatever may have been the different status of eastern women in early historic times, it is the case that the East today identifies woman too narrowly with her function of child-bearing, and the atmosphere of awareness of sex is too tangible for psychological good health. However, it gives women the appealing and alluring aspect of the charm of sex, and strengthens all the distinctively feminine tastes of an æsthetic nature, such as love of colour, ornament, music and rhythm.

The characteristic of repose, more properly described as a lack of restlessness, is marked in all eastern women. In Asia there is no feverish racing after changing fashions. The dress of Indian women is the same in form today as it was thousands of years ago. During a few years when the fever of westernism

had got into the blood of Japan, its women donned dresses made in the American and European fashion of the time, but it was a short-lived madness. The conservatism of the East soon reclaimed them, and they threw off the new garb and wrapped themselves thankfully again in the folds of the age-loved kimono. The Rebekah who goes to the well today in Palestine is garbed as her sister was when the head of the House of Israel wooed her. Similar is the permanence of the Muhammadan style of dress.

But the unchangeability of form in the dress is varied by the unrestricted choice of colour. Every colour and practically every combination of colour was, and is, and ever will be, fashionable in Asia. The brilliant sunshine gives the blessing and harmony of its background to the most outrageous minglings of red and yellow and purple. It is almost as if the brilliance of the colour were in itself a garment.

It is noticeable that Asian women love silk above any other material, and even the poor women will have at least one silk dress. Silk is not specially cheap in Japan, China or India,

but still it is the ambition of every woman to dress in silk, for long experience has taught them its durability, its lightness, its beauty, its easy laundrying, its ceremonial purity. In a recent large assembly for Convocation in Madras every woman was dressed in silk except the Europeans. With regard to the disposition of clothing, East and West are very different. The evening-dress low necks of the West are shocking to the East, whereas the amount of bare leg displayed by women of many Asian countries would appear highly improper to a westerner. After a long stay in the East, western hats seem a peculiar phase of feminine eccentricity, for no eastern woman wears more than a veil or part of the folds of her dress-drapery on her head.

It is not generally known outside Asia that women all over the Asian continent indulge in smoking. In Japan a very small and dainty pipe is used, in China and Burma and Siam large cigars or cheeroots, in Northern India the hookah and the same amongst all the Muhammadan women of Western Asia. The tobacco seems to be of a milder kind than that used by western smokers, and it is just as

well, as large masses of eastern women are devotees of the weed.

The use of powder and colouring matter for the eyes and skin seems to be world wide. It reaches its climax in the Japanese, but other races also have striking colouring customs. The merchant-caste women in India cover their faces, arms and legs with a greenish-yellow called saffron. All Indian women adorn their brow with a small spot of crimson which denotes respectability and marriage. A widow is not allowed to wear it. Collirium is used to darken the eyelashes by Indian women; blackening of the teeth is still done by Japanese married women.

There is much more display in the East than in the West in the wearing of jewellery. The Chinese and Japanese women wear very little, but women of the other countries of Asia amply make up for their lack. From the lowest to the highest the cry is for "jewels, more jewels". This has two reasons, partly inherent love of beautiful and beautifying things, and partly because the jewellery becomes the woman's property and constitutes her bank account. Often the lobe of the ear is

pierced all round and ornaments are inserted in each piercing. The nostrils are also pierced and nose rings or nose jewels inserted. In the hair, round the neck, on the arms, sometimes almost covering them completely, round the waist, round the ankles and on the toes there are ornaments of gold, silver and precious stones. In those countries where jewellery is popular, it is as fashionable to wear one's whole regalia in the morning as in the evening, in the market-place and at a festival. In many a case a face is disfigured in order to make pegs for jewels whose purpose paradoxically is to make the face more charming.

A more æsthetic form of adornment finds much favour in certain races, namely, the use of flowers for the beautifying of the hair and the household. The Burmese women have very dainty ways of weaving flowers into the swathing of their hair, and at marriage times in India flowers are so intricately twined into the plaiting of the hair that the whole head is covered with a floral cap. The love of flowers for every purpose is a prominent trait of eastern women and shows itself especially in

connection with religious ceremonials. In Japan the art of flower-arrangement for household decoration is one of the compulsory subjects in girls' schools. At the same time it cannot be said that Eastern women are as fond of gardening as western women.

The backwardness of women's education generally in Asia has resulted in a lack of the sharpened intellectuality that one finds amongst American women for instance. The seclusion of their lives also fails to call forward their powers of initiative, and this is accentuated by the strong insistence all over the East of the ideal of wifely obedience. No wife is encouraged to think for herself, but instead to ask the permission of the husband regarding every subject that comes up for decision. The Time-Spirit is modifying this limitation by bringing into the hearts of eastern women the desire for more education, and by emphasising the economic, humanitarian and political necessity for more public activity on their part. It is not that Asian women have not got good brains to-day, but that they have been eclipsed by the domination of other, and man-made,

ideals regarding their duties and method of development.

Nature has given her compensation to her eastern daughters by making them superlatively the custodians and exponents of gentleness. The eastern woman's belief that supreme happiness results only from utter service to her husband whom she is taught to regard as a God, gives her a purity and quiet sweetness not similarly found in other parts of the globe. It also gives a distinctive flavour to her self-sacrifice. All women are self-sacrificing; but the element of fatalism (Karma, the Will of God, Kismet) gives a peculiar grace of resignation to the patience with which eastern women bear all suffering. If they were not so resigned, they would not have so many calls on their powers of resignation; but that is the western, not the eastern, point of view! Nothing can excel the graceful gentleness of the Asian woman, whether she is showing it in the details of hospitality in which she is so free-handed, or in serving her husband with food (no matter how late he may be she will not touch a bite herself till he is first served), or in sharing in the religious functions in which

her importance as mother gives her an essential part, or in her care of her children who are her living jewels, or in her respect and veneration for her parents in whose presence she will not sit down without the latter's permission, or finally in her devotions at the shrines of her deities where her deeply religious nature shows itself fully.

The eastern woman is too prone, in her self-depreciation, to consider her sex a curse, and to think that to be born a man is a mark of superior evolution of soul. According to Christan belief, Eve, the first woman (likewise an Asian) felt also that her sex was a curse. (Why do people overlook the fact that Adam, man, was fated to live under a curse also ?) To Eve, however, was made the great and joyful promise, that the curse would be removed from her as time went on ; that through her power to bring a saviour-soul to earth, the whole of her sex would be set free from the domination of the desire-nature of man and the travail of painful childbirth. The awakening of women all over the world to the enlarged responsibilities that are theirs to mother and redeem the world is a proof that

the curse is lifting. It will perhaps take an æon of time to accomplish, as it involves fundamental changes in the present sex relationships of men and women; in the development of both masculine and feminine qualities of soul in each man and woman; in better conditions of health for women; in the more equalised intellectual development of women; in entirely reformed conditions of labour in the world; in the birth, from many of the purest, virgin-souled women, of many great Gurus and world-reformers. But the Dawn of this Day of Hope has arisen. With awe we hail it, both East and West, the dawn in which the awakened womanhood of both hemispheres is making itself ready to give its distinctive gifts each to each and to Humanity for the regeneration of the World!

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